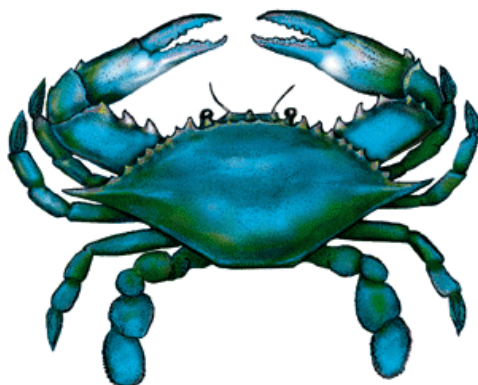


Florida Food Fare

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Blue Crabs

Description: Familiar scenes along Florida coasts, particularly in the summer months, are the many sport crabbers lining bridges, piers and jetties with their traps and nets in the water hopeful for a crab dinner. Like its crustacean cousins, shrimp and spiny lobsters, the blue crab ranks high on the list of seafood delicacies in Florida. Live blue crabs are seasonal and much more plentiful during the warm water months of the year.

One important thing to know if you are catching your own crabs in that it is illegal to catch female crabs during the summer months when they have eggs. How do you know the difference? Look at the abdomen on the underside of the crab. The female abdomen is dome shaped, like the U.S. capitol; the male abdomen looks like the Washington Monument.

Availability: Blue crabs are caught and marketed in both the hard-shelled and soft-shelled stages. During the summer months hard-shell crabs may be purchased live or cooked in the shell. Fresh or pasteurized cooked crabmeat is usually available in three grades:

Lump meat - whole lumps from the large body muscles

Flake or special meat - small pieces of white meat from the body

Claw meat - brownish tinged meat from the claws

The Florida season for soft-shell crab production extends from May through November. They can also be purchased precleaned, individually wrapped and frozen. Properly frozen soft crabs can remain frozen for at least 6 months, without harming the texture and flavor. The entire soft-shell crab can be fried or grilled.

Nutritional Value: Approximate nutritional values for 4 ounces (114 grams) of raw, edible portion: 90 calories; 10 calories from fat; 1.5 gm total fat; 0 gm saturated fat; 80 mg cholesterol; 320 mg sodium; 0 gm carbohydrate; 19 gm protein; 105 of RDI calcium; 6% of RDI iron.

Storing: Fresh crabmeat is very perishable. If you are buying or catching live crabs be sure they are alive and moving when you begin to prepare them. **DO NOT** cook dead crabs. Cooked or pasteurized crabmeat should be kept refrigerated in the coldest part of the refrigerator, below 35 degrees F, or on ice in the refrigerator. At this temperature fresh crabmeat can be expected to have a shelf life of 10 days. If refrigerated at a high temperature it should be used within 2-3 days. Pasteurized crabmeat is heat-treated in hermetically sealed containers for extended refrigerated shelf life if the seal is not broken, and will keep for up to 6 month **IF** stored at 32 degress F.

Freezing is not a preferred method for storing crabmeat. Frozen meat is available in some stores, but is generally slightly lower in quality than fresh meat. It is best used in casseroles, soups, stews and recipes with added liquid. Fresh caught crabs can be frozen uncooked, using the following method. Remove the claws and the inner pod of cartilage containing the body meat and discard the rest of the crab. Freeze the uncracked claws and the unpicked pod of meat whole in a block of ice. Use within 2 months.

Basic Uses: Crabmeat is one of Florida's most versatile seafoods. It can be served in cocktails, appetizers, soups, salads and main dishes. Which form you decide to use for your crabmeat will depend largely upon personal preference and availability. An experienced crab picker can produce about 2 1/4 ounces of meat from each pound of live blue crabs. This is about a 14% yield. The consumer is probably better off to purchase the crabmeat already prepared unless the picking is incorporated into a "crab boil" or "picnic type" activity.

Recipes:

Avocados Stuffed with Crab and Shrimp

A favorite for cool summer meals

1/2 pound blue crab meat

1/2 pound cooked, peeled, clean shrimp

3 avocados

Lettuce

3 tablespoons lime juice

Remoulade dressing

Remove any shell or cartilage from crabmeat, being careful not to break meat into small pieces. Cut avocados in half, lengthwise; remove seeds. Peel avocados and place on lettuce. Fill center of avocados with crabmeat and shrimp. Sprinkle each serving of crab and shrimp with 1 1/2 teaspoons lime juice. Serve with remoulade dressing. Serves 6.

Remoulade Dressing:

1 cup low fat mayonnaise or salad dressing	1 hard-cooked egg yoke, sieved
1/4 cup chopped onion, chopped	1 tablespoon lime juice
Salt and pepper	1 teaspoon capers
1/4 cup chopped pickle	1/2 teaspoon Tabasco

Combine all ingredients and mix thoroughly. Chill. Makes 1 1/2 cups dressing.