

Mariner's Menu

SEAFOOD INFORMATION FROM UNC SEA GRANT

Crawfish — A Fresh Catch

July/August 1990

Crawfish, crayfish, crawdad, swamp lobster, mud bug.... Whatever they are called, these little critters are becoming another food favorite among North Carolina shellfish lovers.

Crawfish have been eaten in large quantities in Europe for centuries. And Scandinavian "krefests" are as popular as Louisiana "crawfish boils."

In this country we have long associated crawfish with the bayous of Louisiana. But they are now gaining popularity in many other places, including North Carolina. Some coastal and inland restaurants serve them regularly.

A hardy crustacean, crawfish are found on almost every continent. More than 300 species inhabit waters throughout the world, with 100 in the United States. Though all species are edible, only a few grow large enough to be eaten.

Most crawfish that are marketed are from 3 1/2 to 7 inches long. Since only the tail is eaten, it takes about seven pounds of whole crawfish to yield one pound of meat.

Crawfish are harvested commercially from Louisiana, California, Oregon and Washington. And they are farmed on a large scale in Louisiana.

In Louisiana—and now in North Carolina—two species are raised and harvested. They are

Golden Fried Crawfish

1 pound crawfish tails
1 cup flour
1/2 cup yellow cornmeal
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
2 eggs
1/2 cup evaporated light milk
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
1/4 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
vegetable oil for frying

In medium bowl, blend flour, cornmeal, salt, pepper, garlic powder, cayenne and baking powder.

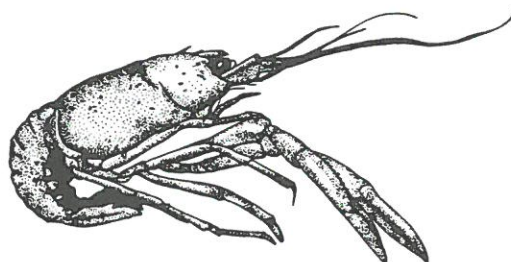
In separate medium bowl, beat eggs. Add milk, lemon juice, Worcestershire and Tabasco. Mix well. Dip crawfish in liquid mixture, then dredge in dry ingredients. Deep fry in hot oil 375° to 400°F, until golden brown, about 3 to 4 minutes. Drain on paper towels. Serve with cocktail or tartar sauce. Serves 4.

Crawfish Creole

1 1/2 pounds crawfish tails
1/2 cup flour
1/2 cup oil
1 cup chopped onion
1/2 cup chopped celery
1/4 cup chopped green pepper
2 teaspoons crushed garlic
1 16-ounce can tomatoes, chopped and undrained
1 small can tomato paste
1 1/2 cups water
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1/4 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
1/4 cup chopped green onions, including tops
cooked rice

Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Blend in flour gradually. Cook, stirring constantly, until roux is golden brown. Add onion, celery, green pepper and garlic. Sauté lightly. Add tomatoes and tomato paste. Blend well and simmer 5 minutes.

Add water, salt, cayenne, pepper, Worcestershire and Tabasco. Bring to boil, then reduce heat and simmer 20 to 30 minutes. Add crawfish and simmer 15 minutes longer. Add parsley and green onions and cook 5 minutes longer. Serve over rice. Serves 6 to 8.



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Crawfish Casserole

1 1/2 pounds crawfish tails
1 1/2 tablespoons margarine
1/2 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
1/3 cup finely chopped onion
1/2 cup canned tomatoes, drained and chopped
1 tablespoon flour
3/4 cup evaporated skim milk
2 tablespoons dry sherry
1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1/2 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup dry bread crumbs
2 tablespoons margarine, melted

Melt 1 1/2 tablespoons margarine in large skillet over medium heat. Sauté mushrooms until tender. Add onion and tomatoes. Cook for 10 minutes. Stir in flour. Gradually add milk, stirring constantly. Add sherry, Worcestershire, Tabasco, salt and pepper. Mix well. Add crawfish tails and mix well. Place in lightly greased 2-quart casserole.

Mix bread crumbs with 2 tablespoons margarine and sprinkle over casserole. Bake uncovered at 350°F for 20 to 25 minutes or until bubbly and browned. Serves 6.

Crawfish Etouffé

1 pound crawfish tails
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/4 pound margarine
2 tablespoons flour
2/3 cup finely chopped celery
2 cups finely chopped onion
1/4 cup finely chopped green pepper
2 teaspoons finely chopped garlic
3/4 cup water
2 tablespoons finely chopped green onion tops
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley
1/4 cup dry white wine
cooked rice

Season crawfish tails with salt and black pepper. Set aside. Melt margarine in heavy pot over medium heat. Add flour and cook until light brown. Add cayenne, celery, onion, green pepper and garlic. Cook, stirring often, until vegetables are tender, but not brown. Add crawfish tails and sauté until just tender, about 15 minutes. Add water and green onion tops. Bring to boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Add parsley and wine. Simmer 5 minutes more. Check seasoning and let set a few minutes. Serve over cooked rice. Serves 4.

Sautéed Crawfish

1 pound crawfish tails
1/2 teaspoon white pepper
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon dried basil leaves
1/4 teaspoon dry mustard
1/4 pound margarine
1/2 cup finely chopped green onion tops
1 teaspoon minced garlic
1/2 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
1/2 cup fish or chicken broth
cooked rice

In small bowl, combine white pepper, salt, cayenne, black pepper, basil and mustard. Set aside.

In medium skillet, melt 1/2 of margarine over medium heat. Lightly sauté onion and garlic. Add crawfish, Tabasco and seasoning mix. Sauté over high heat for 2 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add remaining margarine in pieces. Add broth gradually while moving pan back and forth to mix. Cook over high heat 3 to 4 minutes, shaking pan constantly. Serve over cooked rice. Serves 3 to 4.

the red swamp crawfish and the white river crawfish. The red swamp is predominant. Both species are native to the Louisiana region.

Whole crawfish are popular boiled. In this country they have traditionally been hot and spicy. Most Europeans boil them with dill.

North Carolina is now joining Louisiana in processing crawfish. Sea Grant seafood specialist David Green has been working with a crab processor in developing the procedure. After processing, the crawfish are packed in one-pound polybags and sealed. They are then ready for use in favorite recipes.

These little shellfish have great versatility. The convenient processed crawfish are delicious in étouffés, jambalayas, stews and gumbos. They are great in creoles, curries, salads and casseroles. And, of course, they are tasty fried and sautéed.

Crawfish tails resemble shrimp in appearance and texture, but many people say they taste like lobster. We decided that they have their own distinctive flavor.

Some recipes call for crawfish "fat" as well as the meat. This "fat" is really an organ, the hepatopancreas. It has a distinct flavor, and you may have to develop a taste for it.

Crawfish are high in protein, low in calories and fat. Cholesterol content is being analyzed.

The extension health, food and nutrition leaders who work with us at the Seafood Lab recently prepared a variety of crawfish dishes. And we have definitely added these delectable crustaceans to our list of favorite shellfish. □

Cooking and Peeling

For the traditional crawfish boil (recipe, page 4), buy live crawfish. And when processed crawfish are not available, buy live ones and blanch or parboil them for use in other recipes.

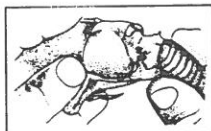
Place the crawfish in a large container and rinse well with cold, fresh water. Discard those that show no sign of life.

To boil crawfish, you need about one gallon of water for each two pounds of crawfish. Bring the water to a boil. Add crawfish. When boiling resumes, begin timing.

Many sources suggest parboiling for 10 minutes. We found that crawfish can be blanched for three to four minutes when they are to be cooked further.

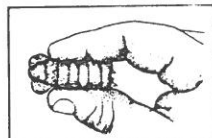
Of course, they can be used raw in recipes, but they are difficult to peel. Blanching makes them easy to peel.

Separate the tail from the

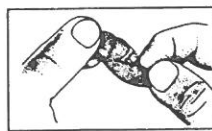


head by twisting and firmly pulling the tail away. Discard the head.

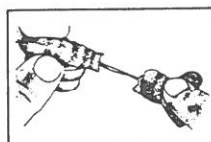
Hold the tail between the forefinger and thumb. Squeeze until the shell cracks.



Grasp the first three segments from the side and loosen by lifting up and pulling around the meat. This piece can easily be pulled off now and discarded.



Grasp the last segment and tail fin between the thumb and forefinger of one hand. Hold the meat with the other hand. Gently pull.



The meat should slide out of the shell and the vein should pull free from the meat. If not, remove the vein. □

Stewed Crawfish

1 pound crawfish tails
1 1/2 teaspoons vegetable oil
1 1/2 teaspoons flour
3/4 cup chopped onion
1 cup canned tomatoes, drained and chopped
3/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon dried parsley
1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
1/16 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 thin lemon slice
1/2 small bay leaf
1/8 teaspoon thyme
1/8 teaspoon celery salt
1/16 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/8 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
cooked rice

Heat oil in medium skillet over medium heat. Lightly sauté onion. Stir in flour and cook until brown. Add tomatoes, salt, parsley, garlic, black pepper, lemon, bay leaf, thyme, celery salt and cayenne. Simmer for 20 minutes. Add crawfish tails and simmer 15 to 20 minutes longer, or until tender. Remove bay leaf and lemon slice. Serve over rice. Serves 4 to 6.

Crawfish Jambalaya

1 pound crawfish tails
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 tablespoon flour
1 cup chopped onion
1/2 cup finely chopped celery
1/2 cup finely chopped green pepper
4 teaspoons minced garlic
1 1/2 cups chicken broth
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/2 cup finely chopped green onions, including tops
1/2 cup finely chopped fresh parsley
2 cups cooked rice

Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Blend in flour gradually. Cook, stirring constantly, until roux is golden brown. Add onion, celery, green pepper and garlic. Sauté until tender. Add broth, salt, pepper and cayenne. Cook, uncovered, about 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add crawfish tails and simmer until just tender, about 10 to 15 minutes. Add green onions and parsley. Cook 5 minutes longer. Mix with cooked rice. Serves 4 to 6.

Crawfish Gumbo

1 pound crawfish tails
1/4 cup vegetable oil
3/4 cup finely chopped onion
2 teaspoons minced garlic
1 cup finely chopped celery
1/2 cup chopped green onion tops
1 cup chicken broth
1 16-ounce can tomatoes, undrained, chopped
1/4 teaspoon thyme
1 small bay leaf
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/4 teaspoon oregano
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 box frozen sliced okra
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh parsley
cooked rice (optional)

Heat oil in medium pot over medium heat. Lightly sauté onion, garlic, celery and green onions. Add broth, tomatoes, thyme, bay leaf, cayenne, oregano and salt. Bring to boil and simmer 10 minutes. Add okra and simmer 10 minutes. Add crawfish and simmer 20 minutes. Add parsley. Serve in bowls or over rice, if desired. Serves 4 to 6.

Boiled Crawfish

10 pounds live crawfish
1 cup salt
6 tablespoons crushed red
pepper flakes
3 large onions, sliced
10 large garlic cloves, sliced
2 lemons, quartered
5 gallons water

Bring water to boil. Add salt, pepper, onion, garlic and lemon. Boil for 10 minutes. Add crawfish and bring back to full boil. Boil for 5 minutes. Turn off heat and let stand, covered, for 25 minutes. Drain. Serves 2 to 4.

Test and Taste Panel

Carteret County Health, Food and Nutrition Leaders who participated in these preparations and evaluations are Dolena Bell, Martha Giles, Johnny Greene, Kay Holm, Edith Jarman, Anne Lawton, Betty Lewis, Lissie McNamee, Jean Morrison, Betty Motes, Mary Dudley Price, Valaree Stanley, Beulah Toll, and Dot Whitley.

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