

Mariner's Menu

SEAFOOD INFORMATION FROM UNC SEA GRANT

Soft-Shell Crabs — A Lavish Catch

What could be tastier than a hard blue crab with its hidden bits and chunks of sweet, white meat? For many people, the ultimate delicacy is a soft crab that can be eaten almost whole — claws, flipper and new shell included.

Soft-shell crabs are blue crabs that have shed their hard outer shells to grow. They are not a separate species as is sometimes thought.

Soft crabs are marketed live and fresh-frozen. If you purchase them live, often the dealer will clean them for you or you can quickly and easily dress them. Handle carefully so they won't become mutilated.

Graded by size, soft-shell crabs range from mediums, 3 1/2 to 4 inches, to primes, more than 5 1/2 inches. They are priced by size.

Natives of New Orleans often claim that they prepare the best soft crabs "because we're not afraid to fry them." Many cooks feel that deep frying brings out the best flavor. When cooked this way, they are traditionally accompanied by tartar sauce.

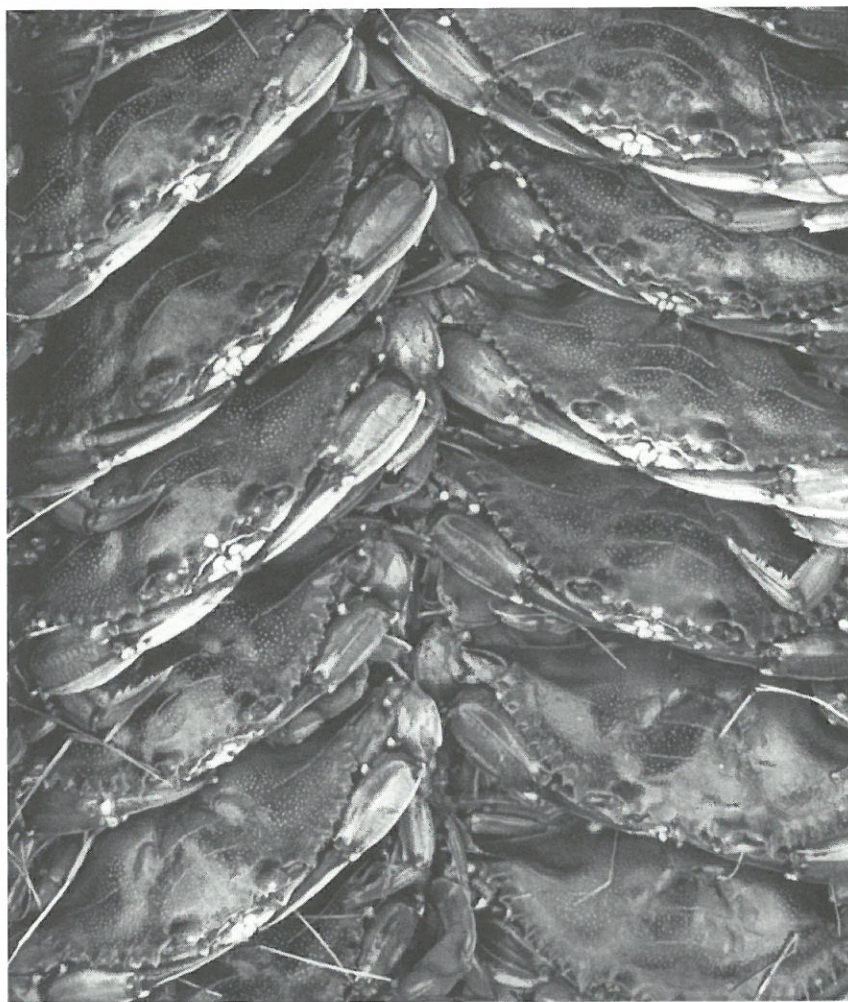
In eastern North Carolina, most people pan-fry them. The ultimate downeast sandwich consists of a fried soft crab served with mayonnaise on a soft white bun.

No matter where you live, you can cook and enjoy soft

crabs in a variety of ways. They are absolutely delicious sautéed, baked, broiled and grilled. For additional flavors, serve them stuffed or with sauces.

A recent *Mariner's Menu*, "Sauce Up Your Seafood," also contains butters and sauces that would be great with soft-shell crabs.

These recipes are simple and easy to prepare. Cooking times are for average size crabs. Adjust time for smaller or larger crabs. On our familiar scale of 1 to 5 (5=excellent, 1=poor), all recipes received an evalua-



tion of 4.5 or higher.

Treat yourself to one of seafood's finest delicacies.

— Joyce Taylor

Sautéed Soft-Shell Crabs

8 soft-shell crabs
salt
freshly ground black pepper
flour
1/2 cup margarine

Sprinkle crabs with salt and pepper. Dust with flour. Heat margarine in large skillet over medium heat. When sizzling, place crabs in skillet. Sauté for 4 to 5 minutes until crisp and nicely browned. Turn and repeat on other side. Serves 4.

Golden Fried Soft-Shell Crabs

6 soft-shell crabs
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons soy sauce
salt
freshly ground black pepper
flour
1 egg, beaten
2/3 cup fresh bread crumbs

Combine lemon juice and soy sauce. Brush on crabs. Season with salt and pepper. Refrigerate for one hour.

Roll crabs in flour, dip in egg and coat lightly with crumbs. Deep fry at 375 degrees until crisp and golden brown, about 4 to 5 minutes. Serve with tartar sauce. Serves 3.

Tartar Sauce

3/4 cup mayonnaise
1 tablespoon minced onion
1/2 cup finely chopped dill pickle
1 tablespoon dill pickle juice
juice and chopped pulp from 1/2 lemon
1/4 cup finely chopped fresh parsley

Mix all ingredients together. Chill and allow flavors to blend. Store in refrigerator. Makes about one cup.

Broiled Soft-Shell Crabs

12 soft-shell crabs
1/2 cup margarine, softened
2 teaspoons paprika
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
flour

Blend margarine, paprika and salt in small bowl. Gently mix in parsley. Dust crabs lightly with flour. Place on broiler pan. Spread with one-half of margarine. Broil about 4 inches

from heat until crisp and brown, about 4 to 5 minutes. Turn, spread with remaining margarine and cook until crisp and brown, about 3 to 4 minutes. Remove to serving dish. Pour juices from pan over. Serves 6.

Sautéed Soft Crabs with Fresh Lime

8 soft crabs
1 cup flour
1 teaspoon paprika
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
8 tablespoons margarine
8 tablespoons fresh lime juice

Combine flour, paprika, salt and pepper in shallow dish. Lightly coat crabs and shake off excess.

Melt margarine in large skillet over medium heat. Place crabs upside down in pan and sauté until golden brown, about 4 to 5 minutes. Turn and repeat on other side. Remove to warm serving platter. Add lime juice to skillet. Scrape up pan deposits and mix well. Remove from heat immediately. Pour over crabs. Serves 4.

Stuffed Soft-Shell Crabs

6 soft-shell crabs
1/4 cup margarine
1/4 cup finely chopped onion
1/4 cup finely chopped celery
2 tablespoons finely chopped green pepper
1/4 teaspoon pressed garlic
3/4 cup cracker crumbs
2 tablespoons milk
1 egg, beaten
1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/4 cup melted margarine

Melt 1/4 cup margarine in small skillet over medium heat. Cook onion, celery, green pepper and garlic until tender, about 5 minutes. In medium bowl, combine mixture with crumbs, milk, egg, parsley, mustard, Worcestershire, salt and cayenne. Place crabs in shallow, well-greased baking pan. Lift each side of top shell from crabs and fill cavity with stuffing mixture. Replace shell. Brush crabs with melted margarine. Bake at 400 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes or until shells turn red and crabs brown slightly. Serves 3.

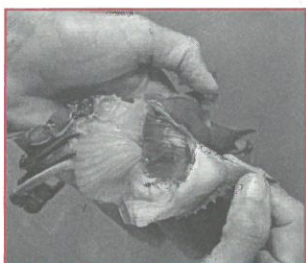
Cleaning the Soft-Shell Crab



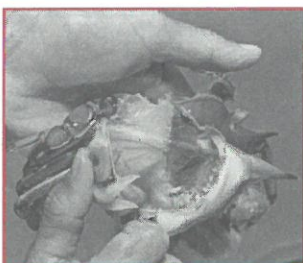
1. Cut across body just behind eyes to remove face. Scrape gray sand bag and any loose material from cavity.



2. Turn crab on back and lift narrow tip of apron. Fold it down, away from body. Pull apron away from body to remove it and vein attached to it. Discard both.



3. Turn crab right side up. Lift point of one side of top shell and fold it back.



4. With small knife, scrape off and discard gray gills. Replace shell. Repeat on other side. Rinse crab well under cold, running water. Pat dry.

Grilled Soft-Shell Crabs

- 12 soft-shell crabs
- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1/4 teaspoon Tabasco sauce

In small bowl, combine oil, parsley, lemon juice, nutmeg, soy sauce and Tabasco. Brush both sides of crabs with sauce. Place on grill about 4 inches over moderately hot coals. Cook until lightly browned on one side, about 5 to 6 minutes. Turn and repeat on other side. Serves 6.

Baked Soft-Shell Crabs

- 12 soft crabs
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon paprika

- 3/4 cup flour
- 3/4 cup dry bread crumbs
- 4 tablespoons margarine

Combine eggs, milk, salt, pepper and paprika in shallow dish. Combine flour and crumbs in another shallow dish. Dip crabs in egg mixture, then in flour mixture. Place in lightly greased baking pan. Dot with margarine. Bake at 400 degrees until crabs are browned and tender, about 10 to 12 minutes. Serves 6.

Pan-Fried Soft Crabs with White Wine Sauce

- 6 soft crabs
- 6 tablespoons flour
- 6 tablespoons yellow cornmeal
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3 tablespoons margarine

Mix flour, meal, salt and pepper in shallow dish. Turn each crab in the flour mix to coat completely. Gently shake off excess. Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add margarine. When heated, lay crabs upside down in pan. Sauté until crisp and golden brown, about 4 to 5 minutes. Turn with tongs and repeat on other side. Remove to warm platter. Pour wine sauce over crabs. Serves 3.

White Wine Sauce

- 1/4 cup dry white wine
- 1/4 cup finely chopped green onion, including tops
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 6 tablespoons margarine, melted

Combine wine, onion, vinegar and cayenne pepper. Bring to boil. Cook until reduced by half. Stir in margarine and reheat. Remove from heat. Serve over cooked crabs.

Soft-Shell Crabs with Garlic Sauce

- 12 soft-shell crabs
- 1 cup Bisquick or other baking mix
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 3/4 cup margarine
- 1 teaspoon pressed garlic
- 4 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons finely minced, fresh parsley

Mix Bisquick, cayenne and black pepper in shallow dish. Dredge crabs until coated. Gently shake off excess. Heat margarine in large skillet over medium heat. Place crabs in pan,

backs down, and cook until golden brown, about 4 to 5 minutes. Turn with tongs and repeat on other side. Remove to warm platter.

Add garlic to skillet and stir quickly. Add lemon juice. Scrape up pan deposits. Pour sauce over crabs and sprinkle with parsley. Serves 6.

Soff Crabs Amandine

6 soft-shell crabs

salt

pepper

flour

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

3 tablespoons margarine

1/4 cup almond slivers

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

Sprinkle crabs with salt and pepper. Dredge in flour and shake off excess. Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add margarine. When sizzling, place crabs upside down in skillet. Sauté until crisp and golden, about 4 to 5 minutes. Turn and repeat on other side. Remove to warm platter.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUIRED



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To remaining oil in skillet, add almonds that have been toasted for 10 minutes at 325 degrees. Stir until heated, about 2 minutes. Pour in lemon juice. Scrape up pan deposits and mix well. Pour over crabs. Serves 3.

Tasters and Testers

Seafood Lab health, food and nutrition leaders who participated in this work are Dollie Bell, Vera Gaskins, Martha Giles, Kay Holm, Anne Lawton, Lissie McNamee, Mary Dudley Price and Dot Whitley.

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