

MARYLAND BLUE CRAB



The Art of...

Buying, Preparing,
Cooking, Picking
& Storing



MARYLAND BLUE CRAB

This Chesapeake Bay crustacean is probably the most enduring symbol of Maryland. Mature blue crabs average five to seven inches across. They are most plentiful late spring through late fall, although crab meat is available in many forms year round. The blue crab is best described by its scientific name, *Callinectes sapidus*, which means beautiful swimmer that is savory.

In Maryland, the crab season begins April 1 and runs through late fall. To be legal size, hard crabs must be 5 inches from point to point while soft crabs must be 3 1/2 inches.

Live crabs may be purchased by the dozen or by the bushel. Usually the crabs are graded by size. Be sure to purchase live crabs with a lot of movement. Cook only live crabs. They should be cooked the same day they were purchased. Live and cooked crabs should not come in contact with each other or be stored in the same container. This is to prevent cross-contamination from bacteria normally found on raw food products. Proper cooking kills the bacteria.

The classic cooking method is to steam blue crabs with seasonings and serve them whole. Hard shell blue crabs can also be used in soups or spaghetti sauce. Steamed crabs may be kept in the refrigerator 5-7 days. Store in an airtight plastic bag.

IT'S THE BEST!

Maryland produces the finest crab meat available. It is made from the famous blue crab, the "savory beautiful swimmer," *Callinectes sapidus*, and has a rich, sweet succulent flavor. The body meat is delicate and firm and the claw meat is nutty.



The blue crab exists from Cape Cod to South America but is in greatest numbers from Maryland through Texas. Crab meat from foreign countries (other than Mexico and South America) comes from a different species of crab.

More and more, consumers are seeing foreign crab meat in grocery stores. This crab meat is actually a different type of crab; the "Asian blue swimming crab," *Portunus pelagicus*. It is harvested in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and other Asian countries. Because of the long distance in shipping to get to the U.S. market, the meat must be pasteurized, and is normally treated with preservatives, usually sodium acid pyrophosphate. This additive keeps the crab meat very white.

How can you tell where your crab meat comes from? By law, the crab meat container must list the country of origin if not from the United States. All crab meat produced in the U.S. has a code from the crab meat plant. That code begins with the initials of the state in which it was produced. All Maryland crab meat will have a code beginning with MD.

Some restaurants also use Asian blue crab meat instead of domestic blue crab meat. Ask your waiter for the origin of the crab meat used in any dish available on the menu.

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Strict Maryland Health Department and FDA regulations assure the consumer of a safe and wholesome product. In Maryland, crab meat must be steamed rather than boiled. This results in better tasting crab meat that has a longer shelf life and contains less water weight thus giving the consumer more crab per pound. *Check crab meat labels very carefully for the origin of the crab meat.*

ALL ABOUT CRAB MEAT... BUYING AND PREPARING



Crab meat processing plants steam crabs that are purchased directly from the watermen and are placed into containers that are sold to restaurants and stores. Fresh crab meat is packaged in plastic containers and should be stored on ice or in the coolest part of your refrigerator and used within three to five days.

Maryland Blue Crab is packed in containers as fresh or pasteurized and is available in the following forms:

1 JUMBO LUMP

The largest pieces of meat from the body portion adjacent to the backfin. This is preferable in recipes where appearance is important. Delicious in crab imperial and crab salad.

2 BACKFIN

The white body meat consisting of lump and flakes. Pieces are smaller than jumbo lump but can be used in the same recipes as lump. Great for quiche, crab cakes and as a stuffing for fish and poultry.

3 SPECIAL

Flakes of white body meat other than the lump meat from the main body of the crab. Wonderful for crab soups, casseroles and dips.

4 CLAW MEAT

Brownish meat from the claw that has a nutty, sweet flavor. Quite flavorful for soups, crab balls and claw-burgers. Claw meat can be

either hand or machine-picked. Machine-picked pieces are smaller and have a salty taste due to the processing. Best for soups and dips, it is the least expensive crab meat.

5 COCKTAIL CLAW

The claw meat is attached to a section of the pincher. Ideal as an appetizer, delectable dipped in melted butter.

Pasteurized Maryland blue crab is sold in hermetically sealed cans and heated then chilled with no preservatives or additives. (The one exception is machine-picked claw meat that uses a salt solution to separate the meat from the shell.) Pasteurized Maryland blue crab will last up to six months when properly stored unopened in the coldest part of your refrigerator (usually the lowest shelf at the back or in the meat keeper) at 32 degrees F. Once opened, use within three to five days. Pasteurized crabmeat can be purchased year round.

Pasteurization of crab meat produces a high quality product that is an excellent alternative to freezing.



MISS ALICE'S CRAB CAKES

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 1 | pound Maryland crab meat,
picked through for shells |
| 1/2 | tablespoon parsley |
| 2 | tablespoons mustard |
| 2 | tablespoons bread crumbs |
| 1/2 | teaspoon seafood seasoning |
| 1 | egg |
| 3/4 | cup mayonaise |
| 1/2 | teaspoon Worcestershire sauce |

In a bowl, mix together all ingredients except the crab meat and bread crumbs. Add crab meat; mix evenly and gently. Add bread crumbs evenly. Shape into 6 crab cakes. Deep fry in oil at 350 degrees F for two to three minutes until golden brown, or saute in a frying pan with hot oil for three to five minutes on each side.

PAN FRIED SOFT CRABS

(with Lemon, Capers, & Herbs)

- 8 medium-to-large Maryland soft crabs, cleaned, and patted dry with paper towels, all purpose flour for dredging
- 10 tablespoons butter
- 1 teaspoon juice from lemon
- 1 teaspoon sherry vinegar
- 1 teaspoon drained tiny capers, chopped
- 1 1/2 tablespoons minced fresh tarragon leaves
- 1 scallion, minced
- ground black pepper

Dredge crabs in flour. Pat off excess. Heat two 11- or 12-inch heavy-bottomed frying pans over medium-high heat until pans are quite hot, about 3 minutes. Add 4 tablespoons of butter to each pan, swirling pans to keep butter from burning as it melts. When the foam subsides, turn heat to high and add four crabs, skins down, to each pan. Cover each pan with a splatter screen and cook adjusting heat as necessary to keep butter from burning, until crabs turn reddish brown, about 3 minutes. Turn crabs with a spatula or tongs and cook until second side is browned, about 3 minutes. Drain crabs on paper towel-lined plate.

Set one pan aside. Pour off butter from other pan and remove from heat. Add all remaining ingredients (including remaining 2 tablespoons butter and pepper to taste) to this still-warm pan. Swirl pan to melt butter. Arrange two crabs on each of four plates. Spoon about 1 tablespoon of sauce over each plate of crabs and serve immediately. The pan sauce is tart and powerfully flavored. You only need about one tablespoon per serving.

ADVANTAGES OF MARYLAND CRAB MEAT

DRIPLOSS

Maryland crab meat has virtually no driploss. This means the consumer is getting all meat and no water as compared to boiled meat that is often high in water content. This translates into more usable product per pound.

For example, the average of 3.5% liquid in non-Maryland crab meat amounts to 40 cents per pound (at \$12 per pound). Since Maryland crab meat is steamed and contains virtually no excess water, it is worth 40 cents more per pound than boiled meat.

FRESHNESS

Maryland steamed crab meat does not support bacteria as rapidly as boiled crab meat. This means a longer shelf life for the Maryland crab meat. And since most meat from other states has to be trucked to Maryland, its shelf life is even shorter.

SMELL AND TASTE

Among consumers, Maryland crab meat tested highest overall for both smell and taste. This means consumers are going to like Maryland crab meat and ask for it on a continuing basis. It may also mean that they will actually use more Maryland crab meat than they would a different brand.

ALL ABOUT SOFT SHELL CRABS

Soft crabs are found on the East Coast from New Jersey to Florida and on the Gulf Coast to Texas. Over 80% of the soft shell blue crabs come from the Chesapeake Bay.

Soft shell crabs are blue crabs that have shed their hard outer shell in order to grow. This process, known as molting, occurs 18 to 23 times during the lifetime of the crab as it matures and outgrows each hard shell.

To catch these molting crabs, the watermen carefully follow their movements. The appearance of the crab's backfins tells the watermen when they are ready to molt. During the shedding, the crab increases its size by one-third, and once it has molted, it should be removed quickly from the saltwater before the new shell begins to grow.

Fresh soft crabs are available from May through September. A live soft crab shows very little movement, especially when refrigerated. Close inspection will reveal some movement of the eyes, mouth and legs. Fresh soft crabs should be purchased live and kept moist and stored in a drip-proof tray, between wet newspapers or paper towels in your refrigerator. They should be cooked within two days of purchase.

Cleaning or "dressing" soft crabs is a simple

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procedure. With a pair of scissors, cut off the mouth and face behind the eyes. Cut off the apron. Lift the top shell and snip out the lungs on each side. Run under cold water to clean. They are now ready to cook. Once cleaned, the entire crab is edible.

Frozen soft shell crabs are available year round. They keep for twelve months in the freezer and thaw very quickly in the refrigerator. Micro-waving is not recommended. Versatile as well as delicious, soft crabs can be served as an appetizer, on a sandwich or as a dinner entrée.

MARYLAND STATE AGENCIES AND THEIR ROLE IN SEAFOOD SAFETY

Maryland seafood processors, who take great pride in their product, produce the highest quality crab meat. They are licensed and inspected by health departments and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to further ensure their product's wholesomeness.

The Maryland Department of the Environment monitors chemical contaminant levels in fish, shellfish and crabs found in Maryland waters. This has been an ongoing activity since the early 1970s.

The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene controls licensing and inspection of seafood processors and wholesale distributors. Shellfish and crab meat plants are inspected monthly to ensure safe and sanitary processing of seafood, plant cleanliness and product temperature control. Samples of shellfish and crab meat are taken monthly and analyzed for compliance with bacteriological standards. The Department also inspects fish processing facilities and restaurants.

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources manages the protection, enhancement and balanced use of the state's natural resources for present and future generations. It is responsible for the establishment and implementation

of regulatory programs to protect the Bay and other natural habitats.

The Maryland Department of Agriculture plays two distinct roles in assuring the consumer safe and wholesome seafood. The Fish Health Diagnostic Laboratory, under the Department of Agriculture, provides fish health certification. The lab also tests crab meat for an industry-sponsored voluntary quality assurance program run by the University of Maryland Sea Grant Extension Service. The Department of Agriculture's Weights and Measure section inspects millions of packages annually at the wholesale and retail levels to assure that packages contain the stated quantity of product and to identify possible product tampering.

MARYLAND CRAB MEAT QUALITY ASSURANCE PROGRAM

The Maryland Crab Meat Quality Assurance Program is a voluntary quality management project of the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) and the University of Maryland Sea Grant Extension Program.

Under the program, participating crab meat processors have exclusive use of the MDA-authorized cup and can for fresh and pasteurized crab meat. The Fish Health Diagnostic Laboratory in College Park, Maryland, conducts microbiological sampling and process verification studies to assure overall bacterial quality and control of potential pathogens throughout the processing environment. In-plant trials revealed good quality control overall and improvement in sanitation procedures. Maryland is the only state (or country) with a voluntary enhanced inspection system for crab meat.

THE ART OF PICKING STEAMED CRABS

This is not the only method, but it is the method used by the professionals, and will allow you the maximum crab meat with the minimum of fuss.

1 First, you will need a sharp knife and a small wooden mallet. Next, choose your crab and pull off the apron and large claws - save the claws for later.



2 Now you can turn the crab over and peel off the top shell.



3 Using a sharp knife, cut away the legs inside the knuckle joints.



4 Next, clean away the gills and the internal parts.



5 Now to the meat! Slice laterally across the top of the remaining shell, and voila! Neatly compartmentalized lumps of delicious white crab meat, just waiting to be lifted out! If you ever wanted to eat with your knife, this is your big chance. It's the only way to get the lumps out whole.



6 Claw cracking is an art in itself. Place your knife at the joint and tap gently with the wooden mallet.

Pull away the remaining shell with your finger, leaving the tasty claw meat morsel.



FAQ'S

EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT CRABS...

It's that time of year again when everybody is buying, catching, cooking and eating Maryland steamed crabs. Here are answers to questions commonly asked about crabs.

Q. How many people will a bushel of steamed crabs feed?

A. A bushel of number 1 or "Jimmy" crabs will hold on average 60 to 70 crabs depending on the size of the crabs. This will feed about 10 to 12 people depending on the menu. If you have all kinds of food, such as salads, hot dogs, chicken, etc., you'll probably need half as many crabs. If you serve only steamed crabs, clams, corn and beverages, you'll need the whole bushel.

Q. How long can I store live crabs, and what is the best storage method?

A. Live crabs will remain alive for approximately 6 to 8 hours if the crabs purchased were refrigerated when purchased (i.e. they were purchased from a refrigerator truck) or you caught them yourself. You can either refrigerate them or keep them outdoors in a shaded, cool, airy container, such as a crab bushel basket. In either case, some will die and some will live longer than eight hours. Before steaming the crabs, you may "chill" them in the refrigerator; the cold temperature renders them inactive and easier to handle. This also helps to keep the legs and claws on during cooking.

Q. Should I cook dead crabs?

A. NO! We recommend that you make sure

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all crabs you place in the steamer are alive. You should dispose of any crabs that appear dead. Once a crab has died, bacterial growth occurs. Cooking them with live crabs will cause cross-contamination.

Q. Can I store cooked crabs in the same basket they were purchased in?

A. NO! Live crabs, like most other animals, contain bacteria. Crabs properly cooked will be bacteria-free since the bacteria will die during cooking. Cooked crabs are ready to eat directly from the shell and could be cross-contaminated from the bacteria on the basket from the uncooked crabs.

Q. Can I send steamed crabs or crab meat to relatives who live out of state?

A. Several crab processors have the ability to ship live or steamed crabs and pasteurized crab meat to almost any destination in the U.S. For more information, contact the Seafood Marketing Program at 410-841-5820 or visit us on the web at www.mda.state.md.us.

Q. Can I freeze fresh crab meat?

A. We suggest that the crab meat first be put in a semi-prepared form such as crab cakes, casserole or soup. Freezing fresh crab meat toughens and dries it out, and it loses quality when frozen in the can. You can store prepared dishes in the freezer for three to six months. Plan to use them as soon as possible.

Q. How can I tell when crab meat becomes spoiled?

A. Spoiled crab meat is sticky, has an ammonia odor and is yellowish in color. Crab meat should remain fresh for three to five days and should be stored in the coldest part of your refrigerator. Place ice in a bowl or refrigerator compartment, and place the sealed container in the ice to ensure the meat stays very cold.

Q. How should I handle crab vegetable soup after it has been cooked?

A. Fill your sink with cold water, place the

pot of soup in the sink and stir for 10 minutes to speed up cooling. Fill small containers (pints or quarts) with soup, cover and refrigerate immediately. Do not put the whole pot of soup in the refrigerator because this could cause spoilage.

Q. Does fresh picked crab meat contain salt?

A. According to the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, by law Maryland licensed crab processors must use only water to steam the crabs for fresh or pasteurized crab meat. A salt solution is used only in the processing of machine picked crab meat. Processors must list additives (including salt) on the can. Crabs steamed prior to purchase may have salt and other seafood seasonings added. Maryland does not regulate additives for steamed crabs. If you are on a sodium-restricted diet, steam your own crabs or purchase fresh handpicked meat to be safe.

Q. May I eat crabs on a low cholesterol or low fat diet?

A. Yes, although the blue crab has more cholesterol than most other types of seafood, it contains only 95 mg per three ounce cooked serving. Moderate amounts of crab meat may be allowed within your diet. Check with your doctor or a registered dietitian.

Q. How long can the steamed crabs be left in the refrigerator?

A. 5-7 days in air tight container

Q. How long can fresh crab meat be kept in the refrigerator?

A. Crab meat should be used within 3-5 days and stored in the coldest part of the refrigerator.

NUTRITION

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 3 ounces (85g)

Amount Per Serving

Calories	89
Calories from Fat	22
Total Fat	3g
Saturated Fat	1g
Cholesterol	95mg
Sodium	274mg
Protein	16g
Vitamin A	2%
Vitamin C	0%
Calcium	10%
Iron	11%

Crab meat is an excellent source of high quality protein, very low in fat, especially saturated fat, is a high source of phosphorus, zinc and copper as well as a good source of calcium and iron.

A note on cholesterol...

High blood cholesterol is only partially determined by the amount of cholesterol you eat in foods. Major health organizations such as the American Heart Association and the National Academy of Sciences recommend a daily limit of 300 milligrams.

When blood cholesterol is high it is primarily the result of eating too much saturated fat. Saturated fat is what turns your body on to making cholesterol. Current recommendations include limiting the amount of saturated fat in your daily diet to less than one-third your total fat intake or 20 milligrams per 2,000 calorie diet.

Although crab meat contains cholesterol, it is important to note that crab meat is low in fat (3 grams per serving) and especially low in saturated fat (1 gram per serving). If you are on a very restricted diet consult with your doctor or registered dietitian.

CRAB QUICHE

Pastry for 1 (10-inch) pie, unbaked

1 pound Maryland crab meat

3/4 cups shredded Gruyere cheese

4 eggs

1 cup half and half

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg

1/4 teaspoon chopped parsley

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F. Roll out pastry to fit a 10-inch pie pan. Place pastry in pan. Line pastry shell with foil; fill with rice, beans or metal pie weights. Bake 10 minutes; remove weights and foil from pastry shell. Reduce oven temperature to 325 degrees F. Return pastry shell to oven; bake 10 minutes longer. Cool in pan on a wire rack. Sprinkle half the cheese into cooled pastry shell. Top with crab meat. In a medium bowl, beat eggs; beat in half and half, salt, nutmeg and parsley. Pour over crab meat; sprinkle with remaining cheese. Bake 55 to 65 minutes or until a knife inserted in center comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes before cutting. Serve warm or at room temperature. Makes 6 servings.

PATUXENT MARINATED CRAB MEAT

1 pound Maryland crab meat, fresh or pasteurized

1/3 cup onion, finely chopped

1/4 cup vegetable oil

1/2 cup water

1/2 cup cider vinegar

1 tablespoon seafood seasoning

1 tablespoon fresh parsley

Carefully pick over crab meat to remove any cartilage. Gently mix onion into the crab meat. Make vinaigrette of the remaining ingredients and pour over the crab meat. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours. Serve with crackers as an appetizer.

HOT CRAB DIP

- 1/2 pound (8 ounces) Maryland crab meat
- 1 (8 ounce) package cream cheese, softened
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 2 tablespoons salad dressing
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 1/4 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard
- pinch garlic salt
- 1 tablespoon milk
- 1/4 cup cheddar cheese, grated

Remove cartilage from crab meat. In large bowl, mix cream cheese, sour cream, salad dressing, lemon juice, Worcestershire sauce, mustard and garlic salt until smooth. Add enough milk to make mixture creamy. Stir in 2 tablespoons of the grated cheese. Fold crab meat into cream cheese mixture.

Pour into greased 1-quart casserole. Top with remaining cheese. Bake 325 degrees F, until mixture is bubbly and browned on top, about 30 minutes. Serve with crackers. Makes about 4 cups dip.

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