

CATCHING CRAWDADS by Roger Urbaniak

My yard is littered with crayfish pots; four of them anyway. They have been used several times, never successfully. I tried them at a few lakes plus several Lake Washington locations, using baits ranging from perch meat to cat food. I left my pots baited for as short as two hours and as long as two days. Only recently did I learn to leave them overnight for the primarily nighttime feeders. My crayfish pots thus far have caught only one scrawny crayfish. I didn't even have the heart to boil it by itself, so I just let it go. I hoped that someday I might be able to harvest its offspring, if I could figure out how to do it.

I know crayfish exist, especially in Lake Washington. I have watched a scuba diver harvest a bag full by hand from Bellevue's Meydenbauer Bay plus a friend of mine successfully took them in commercial quantities near the arboretum. Two of my angling buddies claim to take them with their pots and/or ring net from the lake and frustrate me even more when they talk of some becoming almost as large as lobster. I was ready to throw in the towel when, quite by accident, I found success.

Dove hunting season 2012 was when I experienced my break through, crawdad harvesting, moment. I had dropped a dove on the far side of an irrigation ditch, removed my boots and waded in the ditch to retrieve my prize. Several crayfish darted from the grass as I waded; many were eating size. Later as I walked near the same ditch, I observed piles of discarded crayfish claws. Enterprising heron developed techniques to catch crayfish. I was encouraged by what I saw and had an idea on how to catch them.

When Linda and I went out to dinner that night I discussed my find and asked her if she might be interested in exploring the possibilities of catching some with me. I didn't need to sell her much as she always seems to be up for new adventure. Next we needed to come up with inexpensive equipment that would give us a chance to fish while we were still in eastern Washington. The local goodwill store produced a wire mesh waste basket and a broom handle, plus we each had a pair of old tennis shoes that we could get wet. Once we threw on some old shorts, we were ready to chase crayfish.

Working as a team we waded upstream to avoid clouding our water. I waded through the deep or weedy areas using a stick to chase crayfish from their hiding places. Linda used the basket plus her own stick to herd the crayfish into it. Usually the wily creatures would flip their tail and swim to escape, but quick reflexes and knowledge of their probable direction of flight soon had them wiggling in her basket. I carried a small bucket of water for Linda to dump off her prizes with a larger bucket on shore, to empty our catch as the small bucket filled. Later I used a trout landing net too, but mesh size allowed smaller crawdads to escape. After 3 hours of grinning and splashing around the canal, our big bucket was full of crayfish; exactly one hundred eighty of them. Fresh water was added before us left, plus again on our return home. The fresh water kept almost all of them alive for our two and a half hour return trip.

Linda got a big kettle of water boiling, dropped in the crayfish for five minutes until they were bright red. She added a spice, either Zaterin's or Louisiana Crab Boil, and let them simmer for 15 minutes. When they cooled, we removed the tails, cracked them, removed the food vein from the tail top and finally enjoyed the crayfish meal that we had so patiently waited for. Left over crayfish then made up a great Jambalaya dish. Happily, our next trip yielded 250 more. Bring on them Crawdads-Yum!