

## CATCHING & ENJOYING CRAYFISH BASICS Roger Urbaniak

Crayfish taste like lobster and are prepared for the table similarly. WDFW and others even nickname them freshwater lobster. Even though there are no recreational licensing fees, rules and restrictions apply. Native crayfish can grow to sizes exceeding 6 inches and must be at least 3.25 inches to keep.

Crayfish, both native and non-native are found in most lakes and many streams and rivers. It is possible in areas that they are highly populated to take hundreds in a day. Limits of native crayfish are 10 pounds per person per day. Non-native species have no limits but must be identified as such. (See WDFW regulations for identifying photographs. Bumps on claws are usually non-native. The best fishing is usually at night in 15-30 feet of water in rocky and/or weedy areas. You may wish to leave pots out for more than one day which is legal, however consider possible vandalism in where you leave them.

Most sporting good shops will carry crab pots and gear needed to be successful in harvesting them. Pots ACwill work for crayfish including fish carcasses, chicken, or canned cat food. No license is needed to fish for craw fish (2021 Washington WDFW fishing regulations) Rules exist limiting each angler to two pots and specifying minimum sizes for various species of crayfish (3-1/4 inches). See WDFW regulations for identifying species. Season is closed during winter months during their spawning period. Open season typically May 1 through October.

Crayfish pots come in various sizes and design. Most common pots will run around \$20-\$25 each and will likely need a float and rope to be able to effectively use them. Pots are not the only way to harvest crayfish however. I have seen some people scuba dive and catch them by hand placing them in mesh sacks while diving. Others simply wade productive locations and catch them by hand. Still others wade and chase them into metal waste baskets with a broom handle. You will be surprised at how effective some of these techniques can be once you locate a concentration of crayfish.

It is important to keep crayfish alive until you are ready to boil them. Crayfish extract oxygen from the water to live and can use up this oxygen and die if many are kept in the same bucket for an extended period of time. If you are transporting them for a lengthy period of time, you may wish to stop and refresh the water supply. I have also seen people who fish lightly populated crayfish areas keep a live well container to collect them for an extended period of time until they have enough for the feast that they have in mind.

Most of the crayfish meat is in the tail unless you have unusually large ones with claw meat. Typically cooking them is quick and simple. Just boil water, add salt, possibly bay leaves and cook for 3-4 minutes, depending on quantity. When done cooking add cold water to stop cooking process. Some people choose to flavor their cooking water with white wine or crab boil seasoning or other store-bought flavoring. Depending on how often that you cook them you may wish to try various recipes. Once the basic cooking has been completed, peel the shell and enjoy plain or add crayfish meat to a variety of dishes with recipes easily found on the internet.