



Farm-Raised Crawfish



Photo Provided by Bruce Schultz, LSU Ag Center

Latin name: *Procambarus clarkii*
and *Procambarus zonangulus*
Other common names: crawdads, crayfish

Description: Crawfish are freshwater crustaceans that resemble miniature lobsters. The most important farmed species in the United States are red swamp crawfish (*Procambarus clarkii*) and southern white river crawfish (*Procambarus zonangulus*). The meat of both species is similar in taste, but the edible fat (hepatopancreas) is much different. Red swamp crawfish fat tends to be orange with a rich flavor. White river crawfish fat is greenish and less tasty.

Product Forms: Live, whole crawfish usually are marketed in 35- to 40-pound plastic mesh sacks. Cooked, whole crawfish are available as ready-to-serve and frozen. Fresh or frozen, fully cooked or par-cooked, peeled and deveined tail meat (usually fat included) is marketed in 12-ounce and 1-pound vacuum-sealed clear bags. Cooked specialty products also are available.

Buying Tips: Most crawfish are harvested between December and June, but March, April and May are the peak months when supplies are largest, quality is best, and prices generally are lowest. Purchase 3 to 5 pounds of live crawfish per person and 1 pound of fresh or frozen tail meat for every five people. For top quality tail meat, choose U.S. farm-raised crawfish.

Preparation Tips: Live crawfish are usually boiled or steamed with spices, onions, potatoes and corn and eaten while hot and

fresh. Crawfish should be kept alive, moist and cold (42 to 45 °F) from the time they are caught until they are prepared for cooking. Although crawfish can stay alive for 24 hours or more, they should be prepared as soon as possible. Before boiling, wash unpurged crawfish thoroughly several times in cool water (without salt) to remove dirt and debris. Add crawfish to rapidly boiling seasoned water, using 1 gallon of water for every 2 pounds of crawfish. Bring water quickly back to a rapid boil and boil crawfish 5 to 7 minutes. Turn off the heat and let the crawfish soak in the seasoned water another 10 to 15 minutes before serving. Cooking and soaking times are only general guidelines because these vary considerably depending on the cooking equipment used.

Nutritional Facts:

Per 3 ounces (85 grams) of cooked portion

Calories	74
Total fat	1 gram
Saturated fat	0.2 grams
Protein	14.9 grams
Cholesterol	116 milligrams
Sodium	82 milligrams
Vitamin and mineral contribution more than 10% Daily Value	
Vitamin B12	2.64 micrograms (45%)
Phosphorus	205 milligrams (20%)

Source: USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 24 (2012)

Storing Tips: Refrigerate crawfish tail meat and prepared crawfish dishes for up to two days or freeze them. Because crawfish fat becomes rancid and causes an unpleasant flavor within 2 to 6 months when frozen, wash the fat off before freezing for long-term storage. When properly prepared, packaged and frozen, cooked and deveined crawfish without fat should maintain high quality for 9 months or longer.

Cultivation: Crawfish are cultivated in shallow earthen ponds ranging from less than 2 acres to more than 100 acres. No hatcheries are required in crawfish aquaculture. Rather, a forage crop is established during the dry months, and it serves as a base for a food web that benefits the growing crawfish. One production method uses rice stubble after grain harvest to supply the needed forage, and this rice/crawfish crop rotation system is common in Louisiana.

Crawfish Etouffee

Ingredients: (Serves 8)

2 pounds peeled crawfish tails (remove fat if present)
½ teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon black pepper
½ teaspoon red pepper
¼ cup polyunsaturated oil
1 cup chopped onions
½ cup chopped celery
¼ cup chopped bell pepper
2 cloves minced garlic
2 tablespoons cornstarch
2 cups water
2 tablespoons finely chopped green onions and tops
2 tablespoons minced parsley
1 teaspoon reduced sodium Worcestershire sauce
2 teaspoons no-salt-added tomato paste

Directions

Season crawfish tails with salt and peppers. Set aside. Put oil in a heavy pot. Add onions, bell pepper, garlic and celery. Cook until soft, stirring often. Add tails and cook over medium heat for 5 or 10 minutes, stirring often. Add 1½ cups water. Bring just to a boil and then simmer for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Dissolve cornstarch in remaining ½ cup water. Add to mixture, stirring until sauce is smooth. Add green onions, parsley, Worcestershire sauce and tomato paste. Simmer 10 minutes. Adjust liquid if necessary. Cover for 10 minutes to allow flavors to blend. Serve over rice.

Harvest: Crawfish are live-harvested using wire-mesh traps baited with natural fish baits or formulated baits. Traps are placed throughout the pond and are checked by boat 3 to 6 days a week during peak harvesting periods.

Sustainability: Crawfish farming fits well into many farming operations by using existing cropland or marginal agricultural land. U.S. farm-raised crawfish have minimal effects on the environment. Crawfish are an important freshwater aquaculture crop in the U.S.

History: Crawfish have long been part of Louisiana culture and were an important and favorite food of Native Americans and early settlers. In the 1960s, crawfish farming made its debut with the cultivation of crawfish in constructed ponds, using controlled water levels, forage management, and water recirculation techniques to produce a highly marketable product. While Louisiana dominates the nation in crawfish production, crawfish also are grown in other southern states. The growing popularity of Louisiana Cajun and Creole cuisine may encourage market expansion.

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