



CRABBING 101...

OR HOW TO CATCH DINNER IN ONE EASY LESSON

STORY BY PATTI MURPHY

It's crabbing season for recreational crabbers! It's inexpensive, simple, and fun—and there's a good chance you'll come home with dinner.

They are not the fastest, smartest, or prettiest creatures in the sea, but Dungeness crab are a delicious delicacy found in abundance all up and down the Oregon Coast.

Of course, you can walk into almost any restaurant and order crab, but if you want to have a true coastal experience, why not try your hand at catching the little critters yourself? For a few bucks in bait, the cost of a crabbing license, and a couple of enjoyable hours in the ocean air, you can go home with a dozen fresh crab to use in recipes such as crab cakes, crab salad, crab tacos, crab benedict, or just plain cracked crab.

I had vacationed in Bandon for nearly a decade before I had my first crabbing adventure. Luckily, it was with local crab “ninja” Dave Schradieck, who is out on the water nearly every day hunting crab, stalking salmon, or chasing some other underwater creature.

Schradieck and his wife Eileen own and manage the beach house I rent each summer. A nice perk of renting one of their properties for at least a week is a complimentary crabbing excursion with Dave on his boat. For guests who would rather go crabbing on the dock, the Schradiecks provide crab rings, a bucket, and measurer for \$10 for the entire visit.

CRABBING DAY

It was cold, overcast and barely sunrise when Schradieck picked me up to go crabbing. He told me that the best time to go crabbing is during slack tide when crabs are foraging on the bottom and not being pushed around by the tidal exchange.

And today that happened to be at 6 a.m.

We boarded his boat and glided into the channel where the Coquille River flows into the ocean. Schradieck jokingly called it his secret crabbing grounds, a tongue-in-cheek reference to the many other crab boats puttering about.

He pointed to a colored buoy marking one of the several crab rings he had put out before he picked me up. A crab ring is a net attached around two rings with bait zip-tied inside. When dropped into the water, it sinks to the bottom and lays flat. The crabs wander in to feast on the bait and, after 10 minutes, you pull the ring up by its rope, causing the net to close up around the crabs.

TIPS FROM THE MASTER CRABBER

“You only let your rings soak on the bottom for a few minutes, otherwise the crabs will eat the bait and leave,” Schradieck said, adding that he uses turkey legs instead of fish carcass because the local seals don't seem to steal it as much.



ROBERT PACE



PHOTOS BY PATTI MURPHY



ROBERT PACE

FACING PAGE: Author Patti Murphy with catch. TOP LEFT: Friendly crab measuring itself. TOP RIGHT: A good haul with crabbing guide, Dave Schradieck. MIDDLE RIGHT: Successful day crabbing. BOTTOM: Crab pots with fishing boats at Charleston Harbor.

Another tip is to set rings out in different areas and, if you find some aren't getting any crab, or some are getting only females and others are getting males, move them all to where the males are. "I don't know if it's a social thing or not, but crabs definitely run around in little packs, like ants," he said with a laugh.

Schradiack put the boat in neutral, sidled up to the buoy, and pulled the crab line hand-over-hand as fast as he could. He explained that you must pull quickly because the minute a crab feels something move underneath him, it will scam.

I tried to stay out of his way, but couldn't resist leaning over the side of the boat in anticipation. Suddenly the surface of the water broke with a whoosh and up splashed the crab ring, filled with crab of all sizes. Schradiack swung it into the boat, and a few skittered out onto the deck and clickety-clacked around.

WHICH CRABS TO KEEP?

He picked out a purple-shelled crab. "Purple means it's an older shell and the meat is really packed in there," he said. "The browner shells mean the crab has just molted, and its meat is just starting to fill in."

He turned it over to determine its sex, as only males of a certain size can be harvested. The sex of a crab is determined by the formation on its abdomen. The female crab has a more rounded design, and the male has an elongated design. Think of the difference between an igloo and a lighthouse.

It was male, so Schradiack placed a ruler against the shell to measure whether it was at least the minimum 5-3/4 inches



PHOTOS BY PATTI MURPHY

TOP: Male crab. BOTTOM: Female crab.

Oregon Dungeness Crab and Hazelnut Salad



Salad

- Green leaf and red leaf lettuce*
- Curly endive*
- Radicchio*
- Watercress*
- 1 sliced avocado (optional)*
- 3 hard-boiled eggs (1/2 egg per plate, optional)*
- 1 1/2 lb. Oregon Dungeness crab meat (1/4 lb. per person)*

Hazelnut Dressing with Tarragon

- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar*
- 1 tablespoon Dijon-style mustard*
- Pinch salt, sugar, fresh ground pepper*
- Grated nutmeg*
- 1 tablespoon pear or apple eau de vie (brandy), optional*
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped tarragon*
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons hazelnut oil*
- 1/4 cup roasted and chopped Oregon hazelnuts*

In a large bowl, combine the vinegar, mustard, salt, sugar, and pepper. Beat with a wire whisk. Add the nutmeg and eau de vie. Beat well for one minute. Very slowly add the oil in tiny droplets, beating constantly with the whisk. Taste for seasoning.

Just before serving, add the dressing to the greens and toss gently. Put salad onto serving plates, divide crab meat evenly between the plates, and sprinkle with hazelnuts.

Serves six.

Recipe and photo courtesy Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission and the Oregon Hazelnut Marketing Board.

across. Suddenly the crab's two big claws grabbed the ruler and held it against its own body and, in spite of Schradieck's attempts, the crab refused to give up the ruler.

Schradieck laughed and said, "See, our crabs are so friendly here that they even measure themselves for you."

A FEAST FROM THE SEA

After an hour or so tossing and pulling in crab rings, we caught our limit of 12 crabs each and headed back to the dock. I took my buckets of crab to Tonys Crab Shack, a busy place on the boardwalk that cooks and cleans upwards of 200 crabs a day during the height of the crabbing season, July through December.

I dropped my buckets by the outdoor crab prep kitchen, and sat down to wait for my catch to be cooked. I was a bit wet and windblown but felt giddily happy and proud of myself. Then I remembered what Schradieck had said earlier as we cruised around the channel. "The best part about crabbing is the instant gratification. I mean, just look at this," he said, sweeping his arms around as if to underscore the magnificence of the jetty, the Coquille lighthouse, the historic town of Bandon, and the unending Pacific Ocean. "You can have the crummiest day and come out here and, all of a sudden, it washes all the tears of the day away."

"Plus," he said with a smirk, "you have dinner." □



OREGON Crabbing Tips



- You can use raw turkey, chicken or fish for bait, but be warned: seals are more likely to go after fish and tear up the crab rings.
- If you crab on the dock, tie your crab line down before you toss the ring.
- In a boat, set your crab rings outside the boating channel so boats going through the channel don't get the crab lines caught in propellers.
- Limit 12 crabs per person, per day with a license.
- Crabs must be male, at least 5¾ inches across, side to side.
- Move your crab rings to another spot if you aren't catching anything.
- When in doubt, the bait shops will tell you what to do.

"Hurry...the Coast is clear!"

Bandon Inn
"Overlooking Old Town to the Pacific"

1-800-526-0209 • bandoninn.com
 355 Hwy 101 • Bandon, OR 97411

SUNSET
Oceanfront Lodging

- Ocean Front Rooms
- Ocean View Rooms
- Private Decks
- Fireplaces & Kitchens
- Spa & Indoor Pool
- Wi-Fi in Rooms
- Guest Laundry
- Adjacent Fine Dining
- Beach Cottages
- Economy Rooms

1865 Beach Loop • PO Box 373 • Bandon, Oregon 97411
 1-800-842-2407 sunsetmotel.com
 541-347-2453 sunsetlodge.us

SEAVIEW TOWNHOUSE
Bandon Vacation Rental Ocean/Seastack Views

Your Ocean Getaway

Sleeps 1-6 • WiFi • HDTV • Easy Beach Access • New Zen Garden
www.coquillepoint.net Coquillepoint@aol.com

Coquille Point Condos • 541-347-1686

ENDLESS VIEWS
 FULLY FURNISHED HOME

Romantic Getaway

- 2 Queen Beds
- 2 Bathrooms
- Towels/Linens
- Dishwasher • Microwave
- Pet Friendly
- TV/VCR • Garage
- Wood Fireplace – Stocked

For reservations or rental information: 541-297-7799
 1324 Beach Loop Rd • Bandon, OR • www.bandon.com