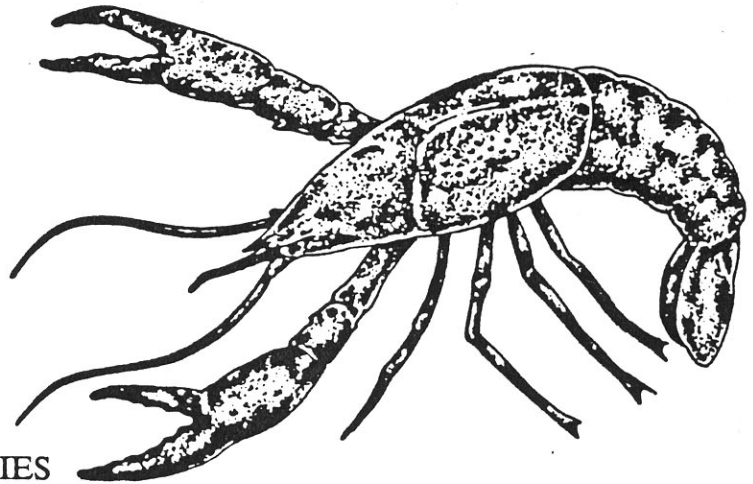




Louisiana State University
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CRAWFISH FACTS AND FALLACIES

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Crawfish cookery and dining is an important part of Louisiana culture. Most people have a "secret" recipe or a customized way to boil live crawfish or to prepare crawfish meat. But there are some basic interesting facts about crawfish:

1. Although there are more than 30 species of crawfish in Louisiana, only two are of commercial importance: the red swamp crawfish and the white river crawfish. Both are commonly found in the same sack of live crawfish and the meat is peeled in the same package. Although there may be some differences in taste and color, most consumers can not tell these differences. These species do not interbreed.
2. Crawfish can be kept alive out of water for several days under the proper conditions. Crawfish are aquatic animals and require water for proper breathing and other functions. However, the gills are internal, allowing the crawfish to survive in dry conditions for varying amounts of time. Sacked crawfish should be kept cool, moist and given some fresh air circulation. A small amount of crushed ice on top of the sack will help keep the crawfish cool and moist. Never expose sacked crawfish to direct sunlight or store them in a warm or hot environment. Never put sacked crawfish in water for storage, they will suffocate. Periodically spraying crawfish with water will refresh them and will help keep them alive.

3. Crawfish "fat" is not really fat at all. This orange to yellow material found in the head of the crawfish is an organ called the hepatopancreas. It is a liver-like organ that is prized for its flavor. It taste great when it is fresh, but unless steps are taken to protect it during freezing, it may take on a rancid taste. Processors use special packaging materials to maintain good flavor. Some may wash the material off if the crawfish meat is to be frozen.
4. Using salt to "purge" crawfish prior to cooking is not necessary. True purging requires holding crawfish for at least 24 hours in a special water flow-through purge system. This type of purging removes most of the material in the gut, cleaning out the unappetizing black vein through the middle of the tail meat. In some places, purged crawfish can be purchased. Although consumers are unable to purge crawfish, it is important that crawfish be washed well and inspected prior to cooking. Washing will remove mud and other debris. Dead crawfish can be removed during inspection.
5. Boiled crawfish with straight tails doesn't necessarily mean that the crawfish were dead prior to being cooked. All crawfish meat, whether from straight tail or curled tail crawfish, should be examined prior to eating. Quality meat will be firm and succulent and appear to have good color and no off odors. Never eat crawfish meat that is mealy, mushy, easily tears apart or has an off color or flavor. These conditions indicate that the crawfish was dead prior to cooking.
6. Crawfish meat will sometimes darken or turn "blue" when cooked in etouffee or stews. There is really nothing wrong with the meat. This condition is common and usually happens when frozen crawfish meat is used in prepared dishes, although it can occur when fresh meat is used. Your parish home economist can give you more information on the subject and can share some tips on how to minimize this condition.
7. Crawfish meat that appears of be of excellent texture and quality will sometimes fall apart when cooked in gumbos, stews or similar dishes. This condition occurs with meat that has not been blanched long enough during cooking at time of peeling. There are natural enzymes in the meat that cause the problem. It is just like putting a meat tenderizer on a steak. A thorough cooking prior to peeling the crawfish will eliminate the problem.
8. Crawfish meat can be frozen with excellent results. Commercial processors use vacuum packaging techniques and special bags to provide excellent quality meat, even packaged with the "fat." Consumers may also freeze crawfish meat, but special precautions must be taken to prevent rancidity from developing. Contact your local Extension Home Economist for recommended procedures to follow.