

Blue crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*) have been harvested in Mississippi for hundreds of years. All along the coast, both commercial and recreational fishermen seek out this seafood delicacy. Its genus name, *Callinectes*, is a combination of two Latin words meaning “beautiful swimmer,” while its species name, *sapidus*, means “savory.”

## Did you know?

Blue crabs spend a portion of their lives in brackish-water areas of the Mississippi Sound. These waters, known as estuaries, are transitional zones between the salty Gulf and freshwater inland rivers. Blue crabs feed on both plants and animals. They feast on marine worms, snails, fish, seaweed and marsh grasses.



Anyone can easily determine the sex of a crab simply by looking at its abdomen. All males have a slender “T”-shaped abdomen (above top). Female crabs have a triangle-shaped abdomen (above bottom), which turns into a semi-circle or “apron” after molting occurs.

Because they have a hard, rigid exoskeleton, crabs must periodically molt (shed their shells) in order to grow larger. Such crabs are called “soft shells.”



A female crab with fertilized eggs exhibits a spongy yellow-orange-colored mass which extrudes out under the apron. This crab is often referred to as a “sponge” crab (above). The color of the egg mass will darken as the embryonic crabs develop.

## What are derelict crab traps?



Derelict traps are defined as traps, which are un-buoyed, unmarked and not actively fished. These traps are abandoned or lost due to many factors including floats that are cut by boat propellers, caught in shrimp trawls, storms and theft. These traps are

a navigational hazard and may contribute to crab and finfish mortality. More than 4,000 derelict crab traps have been retrieved and recycled in Mississippi waters through agency and partner staff, volunteers and fishermen.

The Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program, a joint effort of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources and Gulf Coast Research Lab, is funded in part by the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality through the Mississippi Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP). CIAP is a federally sponsored program that provides money for the state and counties to address statewide coastal issues. Contact the DMR to volunteer.

## How to Catch 'em

Even the most clever crabs can be easily caught. Before you begin, remember, it is illegal to place any crab trap where the line or float interferes with normal boat traffic. Should you catch a sponge (egg-bearing) crab, the law requires you to return it to the water immediately.

- The simplest and least expensive way to catch a crab is using string with fish, chicken or other meat as bait. When the crab takes the bait, the string is slowly and carefully pulled up and the crab scooped into a waiting net or basket.
- A common method of catching the tasty blue crab is by using a crab or drop net. The bait is tied securely to the bottom of a cylindrically shaped net. The net is attached to string and lowered into the water until it hits bottom. There it lies flat so the unsuspecting crab will go after the bait. The nets are left and checked periodically until there are enough captured delicacies.



**A commonly used crab trap or “pot.” A license is required for both commercial and recreational use.**

- For the more advanced crabber, crab traps or “pots” are used. Bait is placed in the bait-well found inside the trap. After baiting, the trap is attached to a strong line and lowered into the water to rest on the bottom. A float is attached to the other end of the line, marking the trap’s location if it is not tied to a pier.

## How to Cook 'em

Once caught, crabs must be kept alive until cooked. A wet towel or a burlap sack placed over the basket will shade the crabs and keep them alive. Pouring water over them periodically will also help, but they should not be left in standing water.

- Prepare crabs by filling a large pot with enough water to cover the crabs.
- Additions to the pot can include onion, garlic, celery, rock salt, lemon, potatoes and corn. To spice things up, throw in some crab boil and a splash of hot sauce.
- While the water is heating, rinse crabs with clean water to remove any mud or sediment.
- Dump live crabs in boiling water, return water to a boil and cook for 10 to 20 minutes.
- When cooked, remove the crabs from the water, let cool, then clean and eat.



\*For more information and specific regulations, please contact:

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**Department of Marine Resources**  
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**Biloxi, Mississippi 39530**  
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**[www.dmr.state.ms.us](http://www.dmr.state.ms.us)**

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## Regulations\*

- Commercial and recreational crab licenses are required when using traps or "pots" and may be purchased at the Department of Marine Resources.
- All crab trap floats must be visibly marked with corresponding commercial or recreational crab trap license number. In addition, all crab traps fished from a boat must also be marked with the vessel's MS registration number. Effective January 1, 2004, all crab traps must be permanently marked for ownership by a stainless steel, aluminum or plastic tag attached to the trap which legibly displays the license holder's full name.
- All crabs, with the exception of soft shells, must be five inches or larger as measured from the tip of one lateral spine across the back of the shell to the tip of the opposite lateral spine.
- It is illegal to remove traps or crabs from traps not specifically licensed to you.
- Persons recreationally fishing for crabs for personal use or consumption, by means of traps or pots, are limited to six such traps per household or registered vessel.
- Crab trap float line must be of a non-floating or weighted material and easily cut with a knife.
- All crab trap floats must measure a minimum of six inches in diameter.
- It is illegal to place any crab trap so that the trap, trap line or float is in any navigable water or interferes with normal boat traffic.
- A commercial crab license is required for selling your crab catch.
- Commercial crabbing is prohibited north of the CSX railroad bridge in the three coastal counties of Mississippi.
- Recreational crab traps are not allowed north of Interstate 10.

# Gone Crabbing



with the



**Mississippi Department**  
**of Marine Resources**