

# Preparing Lobster & Crab

Contributed by Jonnyboy

Two of the finest eating experiences, hellishly expensive in a restaurant, but quite reasonable if you're lucky enough to get your hands on some whilst they're alive & nipping!

As an island nation we are blessed with a proximity to these delicious crustaceans, however for various depressing reasons we rarely get our hands on these fine fellows in their freshest state; alive and nipping!

Part of the problem is that we are generally scared of crustaceans and shellfish, fearing their cost, supposed complex preparation, and a guaranteed dose of the trots; three myths which I hope to dispel in my own rambling way, even if I have to interrupt my typing with frequent trips to the 'Ty Bach';

As far as this article is concerned, the most difficult job you will have is obtaining the raw material, if you've got a live lobster or crab to hand, then congratulations! You're 99% there. The reason for this is unfortunately the demise of our local fishmonger, and the poor state of a fair few of those that remain. I've been lucky enough to catch my own from a small boat, and have the luxury of being able to visit a weekly stall at my farmers market which is stocked from small day boats, but that does put me firmly in the minority. So if you get the chance to buy some, grab it!

Even if you don't have a fishmonger close to hand, a decent parlour pot can be obtained for around 30 quid, I've thrown these from rocks facing deep water and caught many velvets, browns and the occasional lobster.

If you are buying live, then there is no reason why you shouldn't get a bargain, the lobster used in this article cost me £8 and the two crabs a fiver, less than you could expect to pay for a main course in your local harvester.

As a rule, you want your uncooked crustaceans to be alive as their flesh deteriorates very quickly after death, which of course leaves you with the task of despatching them&hellip;&hellip;

There are various schools of thought as to the cruelty of slinging live animals into boiling water, I'm firmly in the 'bung 'em in' category as I believe that the rudimentary nervous system of both animals (especially the lobster) coupled with a fiercely boiling pan will despatch them as quickly as a knife or freezer, however I will relay the alternatives and leave the rest to your conscience&hellip;

The prescribed alternative methods with a lobster are either split in half lengthways with a large chef's knife (only suitable if you're grilling them) by locating the cross marked on the top of their head and splitting down cleanly between the eyes, or if you are boiling them, put into a freezer first to induce torpor. With crab we have a slightly more hands-on alternative, firstly with a long skewer spear them through the eyes aiming towards the back of the shell, following that swiftly put them on their back, lift the tail flap, and skewer down through the small depressed hole, pictured below; the crab will die instantly and go limp

To cook crab and lobster you need a fiercely boiling pan salted at the same rate as seawater &ndash; 150g salt to every 4.5 litres seawater, this helps prevent water leaching into the flesh of the crustacean and robbing its flavour.

From a trawl of several cookbooks there are various schools of thought as to cooking time, but as a rule, anything up to 750g will need around 15 mins, 20minutes for 1-1.3 kg and up to half an hour for anything approaching 2kg, after which remove from the water and leave to cool.

We'll start with preparing a lobster first, as I was making thermidor then the slightly more difficult method of splitting the lobster is shown.

Locate the cross marked on the top of the shell almost half way down the body, with the point of a large chefs knife cut push down and then lever down, splitting through the body towards the head, then reverse the knife and do the same carefully towards the tail until you have two halves.

Remove the tail meat from the lobster in as big as chunks as possible, locate the dark line which is the intestinal tract and carefully remove, then remove the plastic looking stomach from the head end, shown below;

Remove the rest of the white meat from the head, including any greenish liver and red coloured roe and reserve. Now, turn your attention to the large claws. First break them off where they join the body and winkle out any white meat with a pick.

Then place the claws on a chopping board and whack with the spine of a heavy knife, they should break evenly to allow you to remove the claw meat in large sections.

If the remaining legs are large enough you can split these and winkle out any white meat, at this stage you should have two empty shells and a large collection of tasty meat ready for your favourite recipe, or simply some melted butter or mayonnaise for dipping.

Or if your lobster is on the smallish side, make it go as far as possible with a dish such as lobster thermidor&hellip;.

Crabs, being disposed to give up their meat in small flakes provide us with more of a challenge, whilst rewarding it is best approached with a bottle of wine at hand, especially if you are doing a couple of beasts

Firstly, put your cooked crab on its back, and remove the claws and legs, by pivoting towards the tail end of the shell, this way the knuckle joint should come away as well, now lift up the tail and remove to leave you with just the shell and body.

At this point you may get some liquid draining from the shell, keep some tissue paper handy and have a quick glug of wine before your hands get too messy.

Suitably fortified you have two choices, either insert the point of a knife at the base of the shell and lever out of the body, or stick your fingers in the sockets like a bowling ball and lever the body away from the shell

Now scoop the brown meat from the body and reserve, then pull the feathery gills away from around the body and discard (shown on the right below), then split the body in half with a strong knife.

Pick up each half and get to work with a crab pick or end of a teaspoon, getting all the flakes of sweet, white meat out of the nooks, crannies and channels until you have an empty hollow structure, then start on the other half. It's fiddly and time consuming but persevere as this is the tastiest part of the crab.

When this is done go to work on the claws in much the same way as a lobster, only be sure to remove the thin piece sliver of cartilage which is concealed within the pincer meat. Crack the remaining legs open and lever out any white meat within.

Now, return to the shell and push the mouth section towards the back of the shell until it comes away, remove this, taking the stomach sack with you and discard, then scoop out the remaining brown meat from within the shell.

Hopefully you'll now be left with an empty shell and two piles of meat; one brown, one white. Crab is arguably sweeter than lobster and is delicious eaten with wheaten bread and butter, with the brown meat mixed with a little mayonnaise & chopped hard boiled egg.

However, if you want to use our crab in a recipe remember that its delicate flavour can be easily swamped. With these crabs I made a simple clear soup with the brown meat, chicken stock, and hint of chilli & ginger, then clarified with the addition of a couple of egg whites, before straining and adding the white meat.

Hopefully, you'll agree that with a little perseverance you can enjoy a couple of the finest tastes available anywhere, with less outlay than you might have realised. Certainly these aren't everyday purchases, but there's no reason why they shouldn't replace a couple of decent steaks on a regular basis.

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