ACADIANA FISHING

Everyone Can Enjoy Crabbin'

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With the arrival of warmer days in the Bayou State the outdoor activities available to its residents abound like so many crawfish in the Atchafalaya Basin.

Fishing, water skiing, sailing, crawfishing, canoeing, and swimming along the banks of the fun Louisiana residents enjoy with the advent of warmer weather. Another outdoor activity which attracts a good number of recreational hours is the sport of crabbing.

Although most people spend a good portion of their time crabbing from June to September, crabbing is a sport which can be taken advantage of year-round. There is no fixed season on crabs, nor is a license required to take them for home consumption. My first encounter with crabbing dates back to my early childhood, when the whole family would make a Sunday outing to Cypremont Point to fish for crabs. In those days the technique I first used was the one I still employ today, that of using a string line with a piece of bait attached.

Fishing from the bank, the line with the bait attached is thrown into the water and slowly retrieved. The length of your line need not be more than a few feet long.

More times than not, I would find a crab clinging to the bait when my line was pulled in. Crabs are scavengers of sorts and generally hold tightly to the bait they have found. The critical part of this technique is when the crab is within netting distance.

For best results when fishing for crabs in this manner it is necessary to have a fishing net handy to scoop-up the crab when it gets close to shore. It is important not to make too much noise when the crab is within eyesight and ready to be netted.

Once the crab is close to the bank, quietly place your net behind it and scoop it into the net. When the crabbing is right a good number of the delicious seafood can be harvested in a surprisingly short period.

Another very effective way to catch crabs is to use nets. Most recreational crab nets consist of two wire rims or hoops fastened to loosenetting. They are designed to flatten out when resting on the bottom but form a mesh basket when raised from the bottom by draw strings.

Crabs that are caught and placed in hampers or wash tubs should be shaded from the heat of the sun with wet sacks or clumps of moss. Direct sunlight tends to kill crabs prematurely and if they are protected from the sun they can be kept for a day or two without harmful effects.

Blue crabs can be found in the Gulf, in all of the coastal lakes and bays, in most bayous and canals that are linked to the Gulf. Blue crabs can also be found at the mouths of rivers and bayous, or in coastal waters that are barely brackish.

Blue crabs can spawn more than once during the life span usually two or three years. A single crab produces one to three million eggs in a single spawning.

From the moment they are hatched, baby crabs are free swimmers and the process of molting and development begins. It takes anywhere from 12 to 14 months for blue crabs to mature and mate.

Despite the fact that a single female crab is able to produce millions of eggs only a limited portion of these ever reach maturity. One reason for this is that crabs form a substantial part of the diet of other creatures living in the Gulf.

Although one of the most popular manners of preparing crabs is to boil them there are numerous other ways to cook crabs, including stuffing, frying, marinating, in casseroles, and barbecued.

Some of the most popular baits for crabs include fish heads, chicken necks, and melon. Remember, it is critical not to use whatever bait you choose to the string or net tightly for best results.