Five items of interest about crawfish

The crawfish is a creature with an interesting history and the subject of wonderful lore. Here's a sampling; some of this is true, some is myth, and some is true myth.

1. The female crawfish deposits her eggs into a cup-shaped rectangle formed by curling her tail. The eggs are black and beady, and the attached eggs resemble a blackberry. Hence, egg-carrying females are said to be "in berry." 
2. After centuries of popularity in Europe, crawfish stocks there were nearly wiped out by a fungus plague in the late 19th century. The disease persists today.
3. If you play in the rain during a thunderstorm, you run danger of acquiring a taste for crab boil-flavored potatoes, toss them in about 10 minutes before the crawfish go in.
4. A so-called "Exotic" crawfish—the orocrat rusticus—is considered a major nuisance in Wisconsin. It is a fearless and hardy creature that soon may be banned in the state. There are hearings in April on whether the creature will become mudbug non grata.
5. Poland imported some U.S. crawfish in hopes of beating that fungus disease. They grew fast, but were too small and untasty to eat; they also ran off most of the few large and tasty native crawfish that were left.

How you cook it?

Boiling crawfish is so easy, even an editor can do it, though my brother-in-law has the magic touch and I defer to him whenever possible. Actually, there are a surprising number of recipes around for a cooking process that essentially consists of dropping live animals into boiling water. We offer the following, based on our observation of Bob Hester (the brother-in-law) and grave-toned consultations with Iberia gourmet Beulah Manuel.

Before you do anything else with your crawfish, submerge them briefly in salt water (you can do this with them still in the sack). You will notice that they stir frantically; they are being "purged." You don't want to know anything more about that, but you've just made your meal taste better.

Boil water in what crawfish recipes invariably call "a big pot" (oral transmission of the recipe usually begins with "First, you get a big pot."). To season the water, it's perfectly native and legitimate to use a couple of bags of commercially prepared crab boil; add a couple of peeled onions, a lemon or two, and red pepper. You'll probably find a taker for the onions at dinner time.

Dump your live crawfish into the hard-boiling brew handfuls at a time. Let them cook for 15 or 20 minutes at a full boil. They'll turn red as, well, crawfish. If you've got a cooker with a basket, lift them out and pour the meal right onto your newspaper-covered table; if there's no basket, scoop them out with a strainer. Salt to taste.

The absolute, unqualified best crawfish I ever ate were the ones we were cooking in the park when a storm blew up. The bugs had just arrived at the state of cookedness (cooked ness?) when the rain began coming down in sheets. We had time only to pour the crawfish into ice chests—with a little salt—and flee to the haven of our front porch. All the while, as we were in hard-pressed transit, the fresh-cooked crawfish brewed in their own salty steam, loosening from their shells and soaking up flavor.

When we finally plunged into the ice chests about 20 minutes later, they had reached their peak. They were incredibly delicious! They had never been so good. They also haven't been as good since. We just don't have enough patience.