The basket is an optional purchase. It contains the crabs, vegetables and/or fruit as it cooks. The basket makes it easier to load and unload the food into and out of the boiling water. “Years ago there were no baskets and all of the hot water had to be poured out with the boiled foods. This is usually the first piece to wear out,” said Begnaud.

The Boiling Pot

This is an aluminum pot that usually holds from 60 to 80 quarts. It contains the boiling water and basket for cooking.

The Burner

This piece holds a cooking pot on top and contains the butane bottle underneath or is connected to a bottle that sits beside it. The average size burner is 10 inches wide and made of cast iron.

The Bottle

The propane bottle contains the gas used to fuel the fire. Propane bottles need refueling after using. They can be refilled at propane dealers, campgrounds and welding supply houses. Begnaud says the bottle should have a regulator to control the gas flow.

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The Crabs

The Beautiful Swimmer' of Southern Louisiana

Blue crab production in Louisiana is sufficient year-round to rank the state as the leading producer in the nation for blue crabs,” says Tom Hymel, Fisheries Agent with the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service. According to Hymel, most of the crabs are produced in the bays and estuaries of LA's coastal zone.

Their abundance makes eating and boiling crabs a favorite pasttime for Louisianians.

The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service has provided crab eaters and crab boilers with some guidelines for buying, cleaning, cooking and storing those tasty blue varmints.

The Tools

Four basic pieces of equipment needed for an effective crab boil, says Larry Begnaud of Percy Guidry Hardware, are the boiling pot, the basket, the burner, and the propane bottle. The equipment, and how it all works together, is illustrated below.

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Service

Examine crabs and select only those that are alive and uninjured.

Put crabs in seasoned water for boiling. Boil with salt (about 1 lb for each 5 gallons of water) and other season ingredients to taste. Many people like to add “crab boil” bags or concentrate, red pepper, onions, lemon wedges and garlic. Salt and pepper can be sprinkled over the crabs after cooking for additional seasoning.

Bring water with a boil before placing crabs in cooking utensil.

How to fix 'em

1. When purchasing crabs, buy them alive. If the mouth parts are moving they are alive. Even if they have been chilled, the mouth parts should move.

2. If they are to be stored overnight before cooking, ice them down in an ice chest. Keep the water drained off, keep drain tab open and let ice chest for water to flow out. If water-soaked the meat will be meally when cooked.

3. Clean crabs by quickly washing in a spray of fresh, cool water.

4. Keep crabs alive and cool in a cooler or refrigerator several hours before ready for cooking.

5. Examine crabs and select only those that are alive and uninjured.

6. Put crabs in seasoned water for boiling. Boil with salt (about 1 lb for each 5 gallons of water) and other season ingredients to taste. Many people like to add “crab boil” bags or concentrate, red pepper, onions, lemon wedges and garlic. Salt and pepper can be sprinkled over the crabs after cooking for additional seasoning.

7. Bring water with a boil before placing crabs in cooking utensil.

8. Place live crabs in boiling water.

9. Wait until water begins boiling again, to begin timing.

10. Boil for a minimum of 15 minutes.

11. Store seafood in shallow containers so that the inside will cool quickly. This will prevent bacteria from growing in the warm center of a large container of food.

12. Refrigerate all uneaten crabs immediately. Recommended temperature is 45 degrees F or less.

Crab No No’s

Don’t... store live crabs in watery ice or meat will be meally after cooking. place or store cooked crabs in any container which was previously used to store live or raw seafood. This will prevent the spread of dangerous bacteria. use utensils for handling cooked crabs that have been used for handling raw seafood unless first washing thoroughly in hot, soapy water and sanitizing with bleach and water. This will prevent the spread of dangerous bacteria. handle any foods after handling raw or live seafood without first washing hands thoroughly with soap and water. This will prevent the spread of dangerous bacteria. re-use ice that has been used on raw or live seafood. This will prevent the spread of dangerous bacteria.

Freezing Tips

• When freezing crab meat, remove meat from shell and clean meat of all shell debris.
• Do not wash the meat or allow it to come in contact with water. The flavor components are water-soluble and will wash away.
• Place the meat in a plastic bag or carton and squeezed out as much air as possible.
• Pre-chill and freeze as rapidly as possible.
• Use the meat within four months, otherwise a stale flavor will develop.