



SEAFOOD 101

DUNGENESS CRAB

THE BASICS

Market Name: Dungeness crab, commonly referred to as “Dungy” (dun-JEE) crab.

Season: In season December 1st to August 15th. The peak harvest occurs during the first eight weeks of the season with up to 75% of the annual production landed during this period.

Harvest Method: Dungeness are caught in circular steel traps commonly called pots. The average boat fishes 300-500 pots in depths of 5-100 fathoms (30 to 600 feet) of water. After being brought to the surface by a hydraulic power-block, the crabs are sorted and kept alive on-board the vessel in circulated seawater until they are delivered to shore-side processing plants.

Stock Status: There are no stock assessments for the crab fishery. The fishery is considered well managed due to the 3 S management policy (see text box below).

Home Range: From Alaska’s Aleutian Islands to Southern California.

Management: The Oregon Dungeness crab fishery is managed by the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (ODFW) using a simple system known as the ‘3 S’s’ – size, sex and season.

Size Only mature male crabs measuring at least 6.25” inches across the back of the shell are harvested. Undersized male crabs are returned to the ocean to insure a healthy breed stock.

Sex ALL female crabs are released unharmed and return to the ocean floor, where they continue the mating cycle to insure healthy stocks and future harvests.

Season Season closes during the crab molting period so that post-molt, soft-shelled crabs can ‘fill out’ undisturbed.

VITALS

Quality Issues

Soft shells are the primary defect for Dungeness crab.

A crab that is soft will have very little meat and is hence undesirable for the customer. Crabs that weigh under 1.5 lbs are never sold in the Local Ocean Seafood fish market. Crabs that weigh less than 1.8 lbs. are never sold in our restaurant.

The “meat-to-shell” ratio for Dungeness crab is approximately 25%, making it one of the meatier crabs available. The average yield for a 2 lb. crab is 1/2 lb. of picked meat.

Sometimes shells will present dark areas on the belly. This is a cosmetic defect and has no effect on meat quality. With crab meat look for meat that is stringy and dry which may indicate improper freezing. When crab meat gets old it will turn yellowish and give off an ammonia-like odor.

Flavor Profile

Clean and sweet tasting.

Preparation

Fresh whole-cooked crab can be served chilled or heated in a steamer, broiler or oven for four to five minutes. Clean the crab by removing the gills and viscera before serving.

Frozen products should be thawed before reheating. If using as an ingredient in a hot dish – always add it last, as it is already cooked and just needs to be warmed.

Storage and Handling

Fresh whole-cooks have a shelf life of seven days stored at 32°F in ice. Properly glazed, frozen whole-cooks and sections will store for up to a year. Meat picked from fresh and frozen sections has a shelf life of up to 10 days.



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EXTRA CREDIT

Why is the the Oregon crab fishery is considered one of the most sustainable fisheries in the world?

Harvest methods in the Dungeness fishery are very targeted, resulting in little bycatch mortality.

Gear regulations are designed with conservation in mind. Each crab pot must have two escape rings so that females, and undersized males, may exit at will.

The lid closure of the pots must have a biodegradable component (cotton twine) so that pots lost during winter storms will eventually release the trapped crabs, virtually eliminating ghost fishing.

Crab pots are fished on sandy bottom resulting in little habitat impacts.

FUN FACTS

Dungeness crab, reportedly **named after a small fishing village on the Strait of Juan de Fuca** in Washington state, have been harvested commercially along the Pacific coast since the late 1800s.

Dungeness are **in greatest abundance** off the coasts of northern California, Oregon and Washington. The ocean fishery off these states produces about 70% of the North American Dungeness harvest each year.

The season is often delayed for one or more of the following reasons: 1) testing shows that the crab are not filled out enough in meat, 2) fishers and processors fail to negotiate an opening price for crab and 3) winter storms makes it unsafe or impossible for boats to fish.

Oregon's harvest has fluctuated from a low of 3.2 million lbs. to a high of over 33 million lbs. in recent years. **Average annual landings in Oregon** are in the neighborhood of 10.3 million lbs.

In the most recent 10-year period, the 'to-the-boat' value ranged from \$5 million to \$44 million. **The Dungeness crab fishery is the most valuable 'single-species' fishery in Oregon.**

Dungeness crab can live in excess of eight years and reach a size of nine-plus inches. In the first two years, crab shed their shells several times a year, increasing in size with every successive molt. Eventually, molting becomes less frequent and occurs only once year. **Most males molt during the summer months but the time can vary greatly by area and year.** They can increase up to 1" during the annual molt, in a process where they back out of their existing shell and pump up with water to expand their size until the new shell starts to form. Just after molting, crab are very soft and their paper-thin shell can be easily punctured. Approximately two to three months are required for an adult crab to fill out its new shell and during this period the leg and body meat is watery and of poor quality.

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