

Fish Topic by Species

Crab

All About Dungeness Crab

Metacarcinus magister (formerly *Cancer magister*), gets its common name **Dungeness Crab** after a small fishing village on the Strait of Juan de Fuca in Washington state now called Old Town Dungeness. This locale was the first commercial crab harvesting site in the 1880's. Dungeness Crabs are carnivores, and their diet can include shrimp, mussels, small crabs, clams, and worms. The Dungeness Crab inhabits eel-grass beds and muddy to sandy bottoms, from the low intertidal zone to depths in excess of 600 ft. Dungeness crabs are found only in the North Pacific ranging from Central California to The Gulf of Alaska. Abundance of these highly prized crustaceans fluctuates. Total coast wide production ranges from 35-55 million lbs. annually. At 4 to 5 years of age, a Dungeness crab can be over 6 1/2 inches in shell-width and weigh between 2 and 3 pounds. A large male Dungeness crab can exceed 10 inches in shell-width. The estimated maximum life span of this crab is between 8 and 13 years.

An average of 25% of a Dungeness crab's weight is edible "meat", making it one of the meatiest crabs available. Out-of-season, crabs are one of the more expensive seafood delicacies. Dungeness crab is an excellent source of high-quality protein, containing all of the essential amino acids, while low in fat and calories. You'll also find a rich supply of important minerals such as zinc, copper, calcium, magnesium and iron. It's a natural for health-conscious customers. Crab contains goodly amounts of selenium, a trace element of critical importance that works as an antioxidant. Studies have shown that test patients with the highest blood selenium levels have the lowest cancer rates. It also helps protect against heart and circulatory diseases.

Dungeness crab can be one of the most festive dishes on your menu. It is classically served whole (shell and viscera removed, of course), either hot or cold, paired with melted butter/lemon and crunchy French bread. Dungeness crab meat is traditionally used in crab cocktails or with crisp greens in a Crab Louis salad. It is extremely versatile, Dungeness crab combines well with a myriad of seasonings and sauces in seafood stews or soups, appetizers or main dishes.

Commercially caught and cooked Dungeness crab will be showing-up at your local grocery stores and Sierra Foothills crab connoisseurs. Ikeda's in Auburn is popular with crab lovers. The Little Fish Company, which sells fish at the Auburn and Roseville Farmers Markets, also draws legions of loyal crab fans. Whole Foods Market in Roseville is a ready a source of fresh crab. Retail prices for whole cooked crabs regularly sell for under seven dollars per pound which may also include having them cleaned for free. Recent Costco prices sell crabs at nine-dollars per pound... not cleaned. When purchasing retail cooked Dungeness crab, be sure to ask when it was cooked and shy away from crabs that have been sitting on ice for several hours. Also, be on the lookout for 'fresh frozen' crab that may be displayed as 'fresh' but will not be the quality of freshly processed crabs. Vacuum-packed crab can be stored in the refrigerator up to a month and used within four days of opening. Canned crab is good for six months. Frozen crab can be reasonably stored up to four months at 0 degrees F.

Recreational crabbers will capture keeper Dungeness crabs from piers, jetties, and from boats taking their bounty home for a great meal. However, caution should be taken to keep them alive until ready to drop them into the cooking pot. Crabs don't need to be immersed in water to live, which is a good thing since they foul water very quickly and ingest their waste. Crabs can be kept alive for three hours or a little more by placing them in an ice chest with a layer of plastic bottles of frozen water. Cover the bottles with a dry bath towel, do not place crabs directly on ice or they will freeze. Loosely place wet, crumpled newspapers over the crabs which also acts as a tactile shield to keep them from fighting. It is also important to leave the ice chest open a small crack for air. Once crabs die, the meat starts to decompose

if not cooked quickly. One reason is because when the crab dies, its mid-gut gland (the source of food digestion enzymes) is soon attacked and damaged by those same enzymes, and then the enzymes spread out into the muscle tissue, breaking it down into mush. For more on cooking and cleaning Dungeness Crabs, search Google videos including: [wwwyoutube.com/watch?v=c-TBB4uxBAA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c-TBB4uxBAA)