



the
CRAYFISH TALE
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WHEN DOES THE CRAYFISH SEASON START?

This question is really a trick question. First of all, there really is no legal season for crayfish in most states. Crayfish can usually be legally caught any time of the year. If they are there to be caught.

But what we usually mean by the 'crayfish season' is, 'when are the crayfish active enough to become caught in crayfish traps'. And that is a completely different question. Ask a person down in Louisiana that question, and you get a different answer than if you ask a Northerner the same. Down in the crayfish state 'par preference', you will hear that the 'Crawfish' season occurs between March and June. And that is of course when most Louisiana crawfish waters are in their prime; primarily in the commercial paddies that serve as source for both rice/soy beans and crawfish.

And there is a good reason for this answer from a Louisiana point of view. After all, that's when most 'crawfish' in this country are caught and sold. With no doubt, Louisiana is the crayfish capital of the US, probably also the world, and all other US states come in poor seconds. The only serious contender in the world is, of course, China. A few years ago, the

import of under-priced Chinese crayfish created a serious problem for Louisiana fishermen, and an international impasse between the two countries exploded until a compromise was reached.

But the weather down in Louisiana is not the same as in most northern states. That means, of course, that the water temperatures of crayfish lakes differ. And if that differs, so does the 'season' for catching crayfish.

When the Louisiana crawfish season dwindles in June, that's when it often perks up in states north of the Mason-Dixon Line and out west. Consider also lakes of higher elevations, such as those that I have frequented during my many years of catching crayfish in Arizona. A high altitude lake in Arizona, like Hawley Lake, at 8600 feet, has a lake temperature that is more like those in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Washington State. Those are the states where crayfish catching picks up starting in June and July and reaches a maximum in August and September.

That time frame is also what I grew up with in my home country of Sweden, where crayfish catching is a major activity during those months.

So, answering the question about when the Crayfish season starts is depending on what state you are inquiring about. In addition to that, we all know, or should know, that the amount of crayfish you catch in a trap depends directly on how active the crayfish in that lake are. And the activity rate of the crays depends directly on how high the temperature of the water is. If you want big catches, wait for fishing crayfish until the water is at least above 55 F degrees.

There are people who have gone crayfish catching while the lake still was covered with ice. Yes, they caught some crayfish all right, but I bet you they did not bring home any big loads of them. At that time of year, crayfish just are not lively enough to get caught much in traps.

Every time I go crayfish catching early in the season, I become disappointed with my catch. If all you want is a bucket for a dinner or two, who cares? But if you are in the business commercially, it may mean a great difference to you. Personally I have another reason for waiting until later in the season. I am also interested

in catching female crayfish while they have roe under the carapace. Crayfish roe is considered a delicacy by most crayfish connoisseurs. Best month for catching crays with plenty of roe has turned out to be September in my neck of the woods. That probably also goes for most other lakes in northern states.

By the way, many times I have read articles about the Louisiana farmed crawfish being 'bigger than those up North'. I definitely have a different opinion in that matter. The *Orconectes virilis*, the Signal crayfish or Rusties from the west coast of the US, have always turned up larger in my traps than those I see flown in from Louisiana in their jute sacks. Those crawfish are usually rated as 14-16 crays-per-pound. The ones I catch in Arizona are often larger and in the 10-12 crays-per-pound range. And they usually have larger and meatier claws. One lake even gave me a catch of plenty of 8-10 by the pound. So there.

But the crayfish season in your neck of the woods starts when you bait your traps and head for the nearest crayfish lake.

CRAYFISH AN APHRODISIAC?

One internet source tells me crayfish are an aphrodisiac. But I have eaten thousands of crayfish in my life with negligible effect on my love life. Yet, there are some people who consider crustaceans, and crayfish, as food for lovers. But the turnip, also called swede(!), and celery are really supposed to be a natural Viagra, lasting for a few hours. If you eat five or six celery stalks boiled to a pulp, then a man should be able to conquer any erectile dysfunctions. Especially if served with crayfish...

Oh well, believe it if you want.

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