



The
CRAYFISH TALE
By TRAPPER ARNE



EATING CRAYFISH ALL YEAR ROUND

While still living in Sweden, I ate crayfish maybe once a year, in August. For many people that may be enough. Not for me, though. I want to eat crayfish every month of the year. Writing these lines I am still enjoying the after-taste of a delicious crayfish dinner cooked and savored with Cajun Zatarain's spices.

Swedes are very law abiding. But many of their customs and habits are constricted by rules galore. No exception with the crayfish. Most of my time back 'home' I knew that I could only eat crayfish in August, September and October simply because you were only allowed to CATCH crayfish during those months.

Fortunately regulations have changed. The introduction of the freezer changed all that. But by then I had left for greener pastures in the USA. And when I finally found out about American crays, the freezer was already essential in most households. And when I discovered this delightful critter in American lakes and rivers, I put the freezer to good use.

PREPARATIONS

When Arizona waterways started filling my coolers with more crayfish than I could possibly eat in one or two sittings, I started looking for a solution. That solution became our freezers; one top freezer in the kitchen and one full one in the garage. For years I used to lug fresh caught crays to our kitchen in Scottsdale. After a few years of crayfish catching experience, I lugged home over a thousand crays each summer to my increasingly concerned wife. When we finally moved up to Payson, Arizona, I decided to make the procedure more efficient.

First we bought the upright freezer for the garage and we inherited an oldie refrigerator with a top freezer. Also in the garage. Now we were equipped to freeze enough crayfish to keep me happy all winter long.

Then I purchased a propane gas turkey cooker; bought an enameled vegetable canner, the biggest Wall-Mart carried. With this cooker in the garage I could now cook 100 crayfish at one fell swoop without creating an upheaval in the kitchen domain.

COOKING THE CRAYFISH

In order to drop 100 crayfish into the canner at a time, I needed a strainer basket to lower the crayfish into the boiling water. I found a stainless steel one in my wife's kitchen, one that she didn't use as it was way too big for ordinary

cooking. I drilled umpteen holes in its sides and bottom until it looked like a sieve made just for cooking crayfish.

Of course, I also needed a gas container to fire up the turkey cooker. Again Wal-Mart came to the rescue, and with a propane gas filled tank I was set for cooking several canners full of crayfish.

SPICING THE BOIL

But there is more to it than cooking the crays. (See recipes on my web site www.TrapperArne.com.) Crayfish must have some delicious taste. Being Scandinavian, I make sure I have a garden full of dill plants. Or at least a refrigerator full of frozen dill crowns. Or, if I feel like tasting the spicy Cajun crawfish, I make sure I have several packages of Zatarain's crab boil. Not too difficult as I also sell Zatarain's on my web site. Now I can boil the crays either way I or my friends and relatives want.

FREEZING COOKED CRAYFISH

Now to the freezing. Once the crays are cooked and cooled off in their brine, it's time to freeze them for latter-day-dinners. First I prepare all the containers I intend to fill with crayfish to be frozen. Over the years I have developed the habit of freezing 30 crayfish in each container. (Thirty gives me two dinners of 15 crays each. Because of my wife's crustacean allergy, I can eat them ALL.)

So with several 30-cray containers ready (I usually cook several 100-cray batches at a time) I fill them all with 30 crays plus the brine they were cooked in. I make sure all the crays are covered in their brine. With a computer label on the container indicating the WHERE and WHEN and the HOW MANY, I close the container and add it to a freezer. Remembering that water expands when it freezes, I leave a bit for expansion at the top.

DEFROSTING FROZEN CRAYFISH

When the spirit moves me, or in other words, when I feel the urge for eating crayfish coming on, I take out a container of 30. (sometimes they are as big as 50 crays per container; perfect for parties.) And I permit that eating urge to come on about twice a month, so with two dinners in each container, I eat crayfish four times a month.

The secret to successful crayfish freezing is:

1. You must love to eat crayfish
2. Freeze the crays in their cooking liquid
3. Keep the freezer at 0°F
4. Replenish your supply each year.

ENJOY!

Trapper Arne