

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT...

SOFT SHELL CRABS

...and weren't afraid to ask!



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Soft shell crabs are not a species of crab, but rather just crabs that have shed their shell (molted). The most common, the blue crab, which is from the Chesapeake to New England, is usually only available fresh in late spring and summer. **Here in Florida, fresh soft shell blue crabs are available all year round.**

Soft shell crabs are more expensive than hard shells, because of the time consuming method in how they are harvested. After trapping the crabs (the crab trap is similar to a lobster trap), the crabber will transfer the crabs to a holding pen where he will be able to watch them. The color of the flat swimmer fin will change from white to pink to bright orange to signal that the crab is preparing to molt. Once the crab sheds it's shell, the crabber must immediately remove it from the water. If the crab stays in the water for more than an hour, the shell will become hard again. Crabs that are removed from the water as their shells are hardening will have a leathery shell and are referred to as leatherbacks.

The best part about soft shell crabs is that you **can eat the whole crab**, well almost the whole crab. We buy only fresh, live soft shell crabs and keep them that way until you purchase them. We clean them by removing the apron, lungs (commonly referred to as the "dead man's fingers") and the eyes, face and mouth. We do not remove the "mustard" (the yellow stuff in the body of the crab). Similar to the "tamale" of a lobster, this "mustard" is actually just fat that the crab has stored in it's preparation to shed. After shedding, the crab will stay alive by feeding off this fat until it is able to forage again, (similar to a hibernating bear). This mustard is considered a delicacy by crab eaters, and can easily be pushed aside by those who do not choose to eat it.

Soft shell crabs that have been frozen have been cleaned first. During the cleaning process this fat is usually removed as it does not freeze and thaw out well along with the rest of the crab. That is why unlike frozen crabs which are usually thin and sometimes dry, our crabs are fat, plump and juicy.

The simplest way to enjoy the sweet flavor of a soft shell crab is to sautee it. Dust the cleaned crab lightly with flour. Place top side down in a heated sautee pan with some butter. Sautee 3-5 minutes, flip over and continue cooking another 2-3 minutes. Remove from heat and serve with a wedge of lemon

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