

Gangly Delights

Alaskan king crab

BY MICHAEL ENGELHARD

KING CRAB IS ALASKA'S DEADLIEST catch—and one of the priciest. Two jumbo-sized claws or legs (totaling roughly one pound) retail for \$30-\$60. In part, this reflects the cost, in material, labor, and lives, of picking the burgundy-colored crustaceans from pots that sometimes crush deckhands on ice-clad ships hammered by 40-foot seas. But it's also due to the species' snow-white, succulent meat. It is sweet, rich, and tender, and the slight membrane encasing it locks in moisture, retaining the juices. Drawn in butter, says 10th & M Seafoods' Rob Winfree in Anchorage, king crab tastes like happiness. Hold the butter, and it's the perfect dish for athletes and people dieting; a source of quality protein, low in fat and calories.

Proud of their home, Alaskans like to share their goodies, especially when there's a living outdoors to be made from it. Before Christmas each year, 10th & M Seafoods ships about 20,000 pounds of crab to consumers "stateside" and worldwide. About a pound and a half of legs per person makes a festive main course. All king crab bought in supermarkets or online has been pre-cooked onboard or by commercial processors, which blast-freeze it to preserve freshness. The reddish-orange appendages (their color changes during cooking) only need to be heated properly before being served.

Historically, red king crabs were the most important shellfish cash crop in Alaska. Since statehood, U.S. fisheries have harvested nearly two billion pounds—worth \$1.6 billion—from Alaskan waters. However, populations fluctuated in decades past, and some areas have been closed because of overfishing and possibly, warmer oceans. Equally popular blue and golden king crabs (or "stone crabs") like reds, which account for three-fourths of the Alaska catch, are trapped commercially. The three spiny-carapaced species thrive in differing habitats, from muddy or sandy shallows to rock-bottomed deep-water, between Bristol Bay, Norton Sound, and the Bering Sea islands. 🍷



You can't go wrong with melted butter on king crab legs.

Lime-Buttered Grilled Alaska Crab with Trinidad Salad



(4 to 6 servings)

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 lime, juiced and divided
- 1/4 cup pinot gris or chardonnay
- 2 tablespoons whole-grain mustard
- 1 can (14 to 15 oz.) palm hearts, drained and sliced crosswise
- 1 large, firm ripe papaya, skinned and chunked
- 1 cup celery, thinly sliced
- 1/2 fresh small red chili pepper, sliced and minced
- 1/4 small sweet onion, thinly sliced, then quartered
- 2 large, firm ripe avocados, pitted and chunked
- 1/3 cup butter, melted
- 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon chili oil
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 3 to 4 pounds crab legs, split open to expose meat

DIRECTIONS:

Whisk together olive oil, wine, mustard, and half the lime juice for dressing. In large bowl, add salad ingredients and top with avocado. Pour dressing over avocado. Cover and refrigerate.

Preheat grill or broiler/oven to medium-high heat.

Blend butter, chili oil, cayenne, and remaining lime juice. Brush mixture onto exposed meat. Place crab legs onto grill and cook 4 to 5 minutes, until heated through. (Drizzle any unused sauce over crab legs when serving.) Gently stir salad mixture to coat evenly. Serve with crab legs.

(Recipe courtesy of Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute)