

Harvesting Crab



Photo: Rick Harbo

Red Rock crab

Harvesting crab is a popular activity along the coast of British Columbia for residents and tourists alike. Whether you are new or a long-time harvester of these shellfish, the following information may prove useful.

In B.C., the most commonly caught species of crab are Dungeness and Red Rock. Dungeness crab are the larger of the two species, reaching a maximum size of 23 centimetres in width. They are olive to purplish-brown and, compared to Red Rock, have slender claws. In contrast, Red Rock crab, as the name implies, are bright red, have thick black-tipped claws and reach a maximum size of 16 centimetres.

Before You Lower Your Trap

What you need to know

- A valid B.C. Tidal Waters Sport Fishing Licence is required to fish or harvest all fish, including shellfish.
- A maximum of two crab traps or rings (or a combination of both) may be fished by each person in possession of a valid licence.
- Check for fishing restrictions and closures prior to setting your traps. Some areas along the coast

are closed to all shellfish harvesting. These areas are described on-line at www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/recfish or contact your local Fisheries and Oceans Canada office for details.

- It is illegal to have shelled or shucked crab in your possession, except at your place of ordinary residence or unless the crab is being prepared for immediate consumption. The carapace (shell) must remain attached to the crab until it is consumed or it arrives at your ordinary residence.
- Recreationally harvested shellfish cannot be sold.

Daily Limits

The recreational harvest daily limit for Dungeness or Red Rock crab is four for the South Coast and six for the North Coast. The possession limit is twice the daily limit.



Dungeness crab

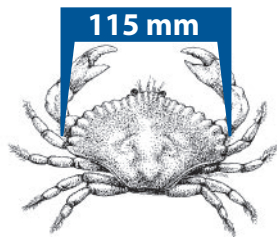
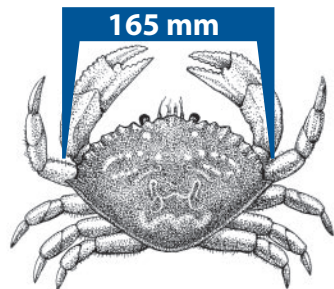
What You Can Keep

Crab must be measured immediately after being caught and undersized crab released without delay. Crab harvesting size restrictions are in place

to help ensure that young crab have a chance to mature and populate. Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) has set regulations for the size and sex (as well as quantity) of crab that harvesters can retain:

- Dungeness crab must measure at least 165 millimetres in width
- Red Rock crab must measure at least 115 millimetres in width

The width of a crab is measured in a straight line through the widest part of the shell, from outside the points. It is recommended that a caliper device be used to measure crab.



The minimum size limits allow male crab to reproduce at least once before reaching harvestable size.

All female crabs must be released. This is a way to protect the stocks by allowing females to reproduce. A female crab can produce up to 2.5 million eggs at one time.

Catching and Releasing Crab

Setting a Trap, Bait, and Male vs. Female

Crab are found in both shallow and deep waters and it is possible to catch them by setting traps from piers. Dungeness crab prefer muddy or sandy ocean bottoms near eelgrass beds. Red Rock crab thrive in rocky areas.

Depending on crab abundance in an area, soaking a trap for as little as half an hour or up to a few hours can be sufficient for a good harvest. Bait that attracts crab includes fish offal or fish heads.



Male



Female

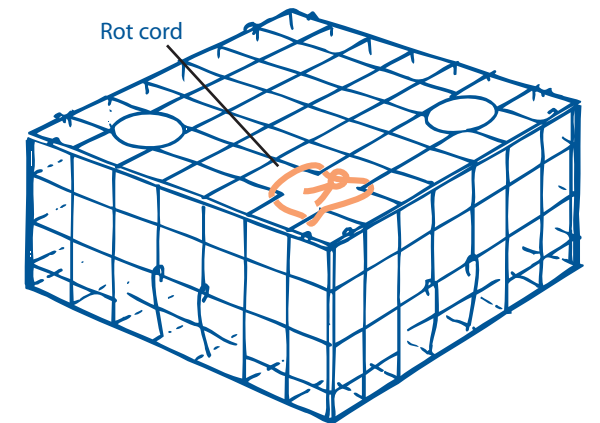
To tell the difference between male and female crab, turn the crab belly-side-up, with the head facing away from you. If the belly "flap" pointing towards the eyes of the crab is shaped like a lighthouse (pointed), it is a male crab. If it is shaped more like an igloo (rounded), it is a female crab.

When releasing crab, do so in a manner that will cause the crab the least amount of harm. Release them as close to the surface of the water as possible, and be especially gentle with crab when they are in the soft-shell phase.

Crab Gear Requirements

Fishing Gear, and Choosing and Marking Buoys

Crab traps are required to have a section in the top or side wall that has been secured by a length of untreated cotton twine no greater than No. 120. On deterioration, this must produce a rectangular opening with a minimum size of seven centimetres by 20 centimetres, or a square opening with a minimum size of 11 centimetres by 11 centimetres. This regulation ensures that if the trap is lost, the section secured by the cord will rot, allowing captive crab to escape and preventing the trap from continuing to fish. To comply with the regulation, a rectangular or square section of the trap must be removed and then re-threaded using untreated cotton twine, creating a space of the above dimensions.



Points to remember:

- Mechanical devices may be used to recover traps.
- Crab can be hand picked while diving.
- It is illegal to use more than two rings, dip nets or traps or a combination of these to fish for crab.
- It is illegal to use a jig, gaff, spear, rake or any other sharp-pointed instrument to take crab.

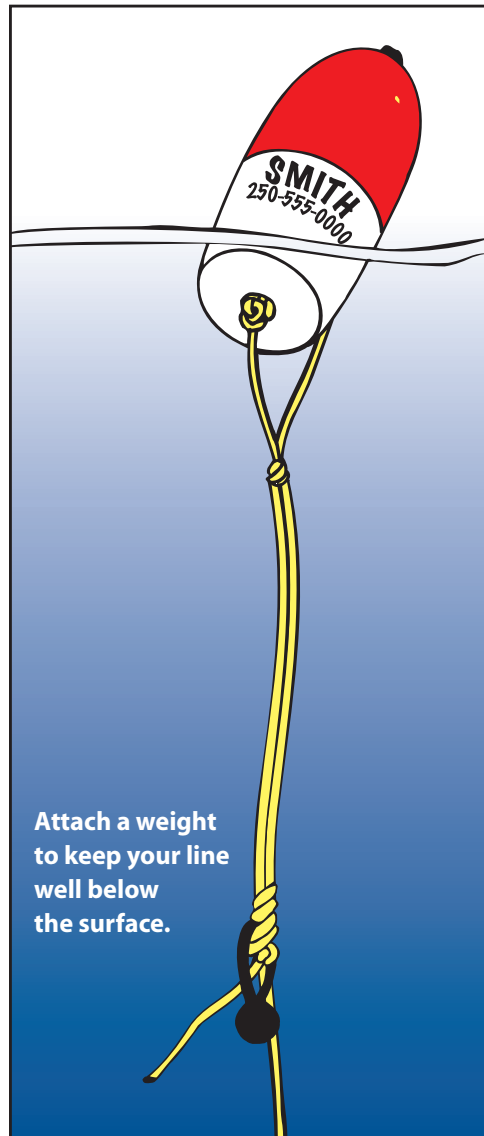
More About Gear

Buoys

Recreational shellfish traps must be marked with a highly visible floating buoy, which alerts boaters to gear and lines on or below the surface of the water, and shows other harvesters where traps have already been set. Traps should not be set in navigation channels.

A variety of buoys can be purchased at recreational fishing stores, major hardware stores, or marine supply shops. Although some buoys are plastic, they are made out of a material that will not deteriorate or fill with water. Household plastic jugs, bottles and styrofoam chunks are not recommended for use as buoys, as they are difficult to see on the water and difficult to mark with identification. They also tend to deteriorate and sink.

All buoys must be clearly marked with the operator's name (in printed, solid black, capital letters at least 75 millimetres high). If the buoys are not marked with an operator's name, DFO may remove the fishing gear from the water. A phone number should also be written on the buoy in case the gear has drifted away, or if the Department has had to remove it from the water, the operator can be contacted to reclaim it. Only one name can appear on the float or buoy.



Buoy Lines

It is recommended that harvesters use sinking line. If you use floating line, ensure that there is a weight attached to keep the excess line below the surface of the water. This will ensure that your line doesn't become entangled in boaters' props.

The Effects of Tides and Waves

Use care when selecting the amount of line from the buoy(s) to your gear. The coast of B.C. has some of the greatest tide ranges in the world, with a common tidal range of 4.5 metres. Extreme tide ranges in excess of 5.5 metres have been recorded at Vancouver, Alert Bay and Bella Bella, and even eight metres at Prince Rupert. Know your tide stage before setting the gear, and adjust the buoy line accordingly. It is believed that much of the gear reported as "stolen" has actually drifted into deeper water with the tide and current.

Floating buoys are affected by wave action. Waves can cause a trap to bounce slightly on the ocean bottom, making it wander, often into deeper water. Add weight to your traps or buoy line to reduce this effect. Traps that remain stationary in the water are likely to fish better.

Do Your Part

Release Soft-shell Crabs

A crab's skeleton is on the outside of its body, therefore the only way for a crab to grow is to shed the old shell. For one to three months after shedding the shell, a crab is soft shelled. A soft-shell crab will yield less meat and of a lower quality compared to when the shell hardens. The careful release of soft-shell crabs allows the crab to be harvested later when the meat is of a higher quality.

Report Illegal Activity

The illegal sale of shellfish caught under the guise of recreational fishing is a problem in coastal areas. Persons who illegally buy and sell shellfish affect fishing opportunities for legitimate recreational and commercial fishermen, either by reducing the available stock or by requiring area closures to reduce illegal activities. You can help by reporting abuses of the resource and fishing privileges, including illegal sales of shellfish.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada is extremely concerned with illegal activity and asks for assistance from the general public for information on contraventions of the Fisheries Act and Regulations. Anyone with information can call the confidential Observe, Record and Report (ORR) toll-free violation reporting line at 1-800-465-4336.

For more information on recreational fishing, including shellfish harvesting, please visit DFO's website at

www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/recfish

Cat. No.: Fs23-452/2007E

ISBN: 0-662-39275-2

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Sport Fishing Guidelines for Crab

