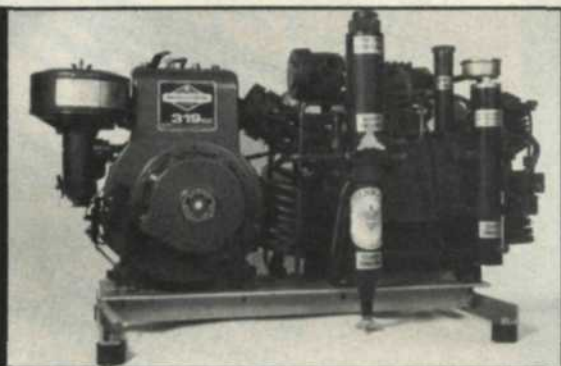
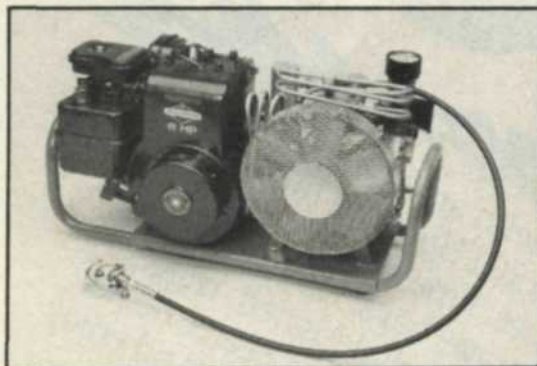


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SD

Scuba diving offers its dedicated enthusiasts a great variety of interests including photography, wreck diving, night diving and taking game. One initial reason man dove beneath the dark, unexplored waters was in search of food. With the soaring price of seafood, divers are again finding scuba diving beneficial for providing food on the table.

One delicacy of the sea found on the West Coast, the Dungeness crab, (*Cancer magister*) has ten legs including the claws; a rounded, hard, orange-brown shell top; and a pair of stalked eyes in

## QUEST FOR THE DELICIOUS DUNGENESS CRAB

crab diving at its finest

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JACK AND SUE DRAFAHL



Above: A delicious Dungeness crab dinner with all the fixings. Below: Clean crabs by lifting shell. Right: Bagging a Dungeness. Inset: Measuring crab.



front. A tail-like section is tucked tightly underneath, between the legs. The female carries eggs under this flap of a tail until they hatch and the tiny larvae swim away. The female crab has a broad U-shaped abdomen while the male has a V-shaped abdomen.

Crabs have a hard outer shell covering their entire body. This is fixed in size; in order to grow the crab must molt (shed its shell) and grow a new, larger one. Most molting occurs in May and June, although it can take place at any time during the year. After molting, the crab ab-

sorbs water and swells up to its new, larger size. A crab is helpless while the shell is still flexible and usually hides until its shell hardens. Crabs caught after a molt have soft shells with not much meat in them. It takes from 30-60 days for the shell to completely harden and the crab to become heavy and solid again. A soft-shelled crab is recognized by the very light color of the shell—bluish-white instead of yellowish-brown.

Two tools divers need to catch crabs are a gauge and a goodie bag. Crab gauges are made of a variety of materials

from plastic to metal. Most have measurements indicating the legal sizes for crabs in California, Washington and Oregon. On the front edge of the crab's carapace (back), between either eye and the widest point of the body, are ten distinct, serrated projections or teeth, with the tenth tooth at the widest point of the shell. The gauge is placed across the shell, immediately in front of these points. This measurement must be equal to or greater than, the required minimum.

Dungeness crabs can be a challenge to catch as they are masters of camouflage. They can often be found burrowing in the sand, in shallow water, where there is good tidal movement. The Dungeness is frequently buried in the sand. It also hides under seaweed, or other debris.

Divers tend to have the best luck crab-



## GAME DIVING SERIES



### DUNGENESS CRAB REGULATIONS

California—6 1/4 inches minimum size; limit of 10; either sex; fishing license required; Del Norte/Humbolt/Mendocino Counties open Dec. 1 through July 30. All others second Tuesday in Nov. through June 30. No taking in S.F. Bay and backwaters, San Pablo Bay or Golden Gate to Carqueneq.

Oregon—5 3/4 inches minimum size; limit of 12; only males can be collected; no license required; Pacific Ocean closed from Sept. 16 to Nov. 30. Bays, beaches and tidepools open all year.

Washington—6 inches minimum size; limit of 6; only males can be collected; no license required; season open all year. Unlawful to take soft-shelled.

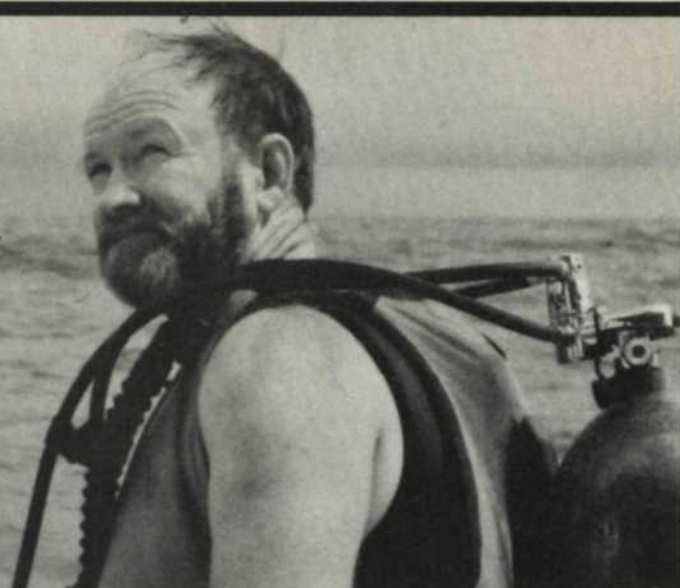
All undersized crabs or restricted females must be returned quickly to the water unharmed. Be sure to check local fish and game requirements.

Once you have surfaced, re-check the crabs' measurements.

bing on the slack tide, either high or low. This is when there is the least amount of tidal movement and the crabs come out of hiding to feed. Dungeness crabs seem to have excellent visual perception, so all precautions must be taken to avoid being seen. One method is to establish buoyancy at about 10 feet above the ocean floor. This way you can see them, but hopefully they won't see you until it's too late. It is best to come from behind the crab, rather than from in front. Indentations in the sand indicate the crab's shell front. If you are careful, you can grab quickly before it knows what hit it. Be constantly aware of its claws. Hold the crab from the back or across the center of the carapace. Crabs have excellent reach and have been known to break fingers. Once you have a victim, check for gender, measure to see if it is legal, quickly get it into the

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Charles Garrett in Cartagena with Scuba World crew.

Photo by Hal Martin.

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## DUNGENESS CRAB

(Continued from Page 31)

bag and start your search again.

It seems that beginning crab hunters have a bit of trouble determining a legal sized crab from a distance. We can remember coming upon one poor victim scurrying across the bottom. It had several scratches on his shell, indicating several divers had measured him and found him a trifle short.

### CRAB MEAT DELIGHT

- 2 tbsp. chopped green pepper
- 2 tbsp. minced onion
- 3 tbsp. butter or margarine
- 2 tbsp. flour
- 1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 1/4 cups milk
- 1/2 cup shredded cheese
- 1/4 cup condensed tomato soup or catsup
- 2 cups crab meat, chunked
- Hot steamed rice

Drain and flake crab meat. Saute green pepper and onion until tender but not browned. Stir in flour, Worcestershire sauce and milk and continue to stir (this guarantees no lumps). Now add the cheese and soup, stirring again until the cheese melts. Serve immediately over the steaming hot rice. Yields 4 to 6 servings.

### CRAB FRITTERS

- 1/2 cup crab meat, 1 cup biscuit mix
- 1/2 cup milk, 1 egg, slightly beaten
- 1/2 tsp. salt, 1/8 tsp. pepper
- 1 tsp. instant minced onion
- Dash hot pepper sauce

Mix biscuit mix, milk, eggs and seasoning and add onion and crab meat. Pour peanut oil or cooking oil into deep fry pan and heat to 375°F. Spoon mixture into hot oil and fry until brown. Drain and serve. Yields 2 servings.

### CRAB MEAT SALAD

- 2 cups cooked crabmeat, flaked
- 4 eggs hard boiled, diced
- 1/4 cup mayonnaise
- 2 tbsp. onion, minced
- 1 tbsp. lemon juice
- 3 tbsp. tarragon vinegar
- 1/8 tsp. garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 green pepper, diced
- 1/2 cup celery, diced
- 6 cherry tomatoes
- Lettuce

Mix the spices and the liquids with the mayonnaise and chill sauce. Lightly mix the crabmeat with the egg and diced vegetables and carefully blend with the rest of the ingredients. Serve on lettuce and garnish with the tomatoes. Yields 6 servings.

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Once you have surfaced, re-check the crabs' measurements.

In late spring, male and female crabs can be found in shallow water in mating pairs. While the act of mating takes a half hour or less, the male will often carry the female clasped to his underside for a month or more waiting for her to molt, since this is the only time when mating can take place successfully. The male is in prime condition at this time.

As crabs mature they often segregate themselves according to size and sex. If you find nothing but females, look for males at a different depth.

Size limits and other regulations for crabs vary from state to state and you must check the laws before diving. Included here is a brief chart of the regulations on the West Coast. 🐚

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Shawn McDermott will offer a PADI specialty course in underwater photography through Force E stores in south Florida, from West Palm Beach to Fort Lauderdale. For more information, contact any Force E store or Shawn McDermott, P.O. Box 1089, Lake Worth, Florida 33460. 🐚

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