

# Montana Crayfish Boil

By David Schmetterling | Preparation time: 30 minutes | Cooking time: 40-45 minutes | Serves 2-4



**C**rayfish (crawfish) are generally thought of as aquatic crustaceans of the American South, where “crawfish boils” are a culinary tradition. But Montana also has crayfish, sometimes called crawdads, and these small cousins of the saltwater lobster can be harvested and cooked just as they would be in Louisiana or Mississippi.

The two most common species here are the native signal crayfish, found in western Montana, and the virile crayfish, which is native to eastern Montana but has spread statewide due to people illegally dumping them in lakes.

Crayfish are fun to catch, either by using traps, snatching them up while snorkeling, or when walking the banks of lakes or big rivers at night with a flashlight and plucking them from the shallows.

To trap crayfish, use fresh cut-up fish as bait. Tie bait in a cheesecloth bag and use wire to suspend it inside a minnow or crayfish trap so the bait doesn’t touch the sides. This way the crayfish have to go into the trap to get the bait.

If you go crayfishing, make sure to check the Montana fishing regulations and bring your fishing license and a cooler of cold tap water (it’s illegal to transport water from any waterbody). Once home, keep the live crayfish in the cooler for 12 to 24 hours so they can evacuate their hindgut (the “vein” on top of their tail meat), known as “purging.” This also eliminates debris in their gills and on their bodies. To keep the water well below room temperature, drain and refill the cooler a few times.

A boil is traditionally a social event that calls for cooking 100 or more crayfish. Here’s my recipe for a more modest affair, serving just two to four people. This recipe is a typical Southern boil, using andouille sausage to add spicy, smoky flavor.

Traditionally a boil is drained and the pot contents dumped out on a newspaper in the middle of a table. My wife and I are Northerners, so we use plates.

—David Schmetterling coordinates the FWP Fisheries Research Program.

## INGREDIENTS

- 2-2.5 gallons water
- 1 (4-oz.) package crab boil seasoning (Zatarain’s or other)
- 1/4 c. Old Bay seafood seasoning
- 1 c. kosher salt
- 4-6 bay leaves
- 3-4 lemons, halved
- 3-4 garlic heads, halved crosswise
- 3 yellow onions, halved
- 6-8 red potatoes, halved
- 1-2 pounds andouille sausage
- 4 ears corn, shucked and cut into 3-4 pieces each
- 25-40 live fresh crayfish, purged (12-24 hours)

## DIRECTIONS

Bring water to a rolling boil in a large stock pot.

Add crab boil and Old Bay seasonings, salt, bay leaves, lemons, garlic, and onions. Stir until spices are dissolved.

Add potatoes and return to a boil. Boil 15 minutes.

Add sausage and reduce to a simmer for 5 minutes.

Add corn and simmer 10 minutes.

Add crayfish and simmer 5 minutes (don’t overcook).

Pour mixture through a large colander. Discard lemons and seasoning pouch.

Serve with any commercial hot sauce. ■

