

Crabs Are Popular Menu Item

George Baxevanis, owner of Asheville seafood restaurant, Fisherman's Quarters II, tells me that, crabs are one of his most popular menu items. 'No matter how we serve these crabs, our guests want more. And, George is right. Crabs are really good.

Crabs have been an important fishery worldwide for centuries. Caught in traps, by hand or farm raised crabs make up 20% of all crustaceans harvested annually, making them pretty popular amongst restaurants, not just seafood restaurants 1.5 tones are caught, farmed and consumed each and every year. Whether Blue, Snow, King (not really a true crab), Dungeness or Stone Asheville restaurants are serving crab.

A Little about Crabs

A decapod (10-legged) crustacean, crabs live in the world's oceans. Others are freshwater and in some places, the even live on land. We're all familiar with sand crabs and hermit crabs (not really a true crab).

One of the most commonly-recognized is the Blue Crab of Virginia and the Carolinas. The crab's scientific name, *Calinectus Sapidus*, means savory, beautiful swimmer. Now, not all crabs can swim...most are restricted to the "crab walk"...a kind of sideways dance. Blue Crabs have specialty legs in the back that are used for swimming, but even when swimming they move sideways.

Crabs in the South

Blue Crabs are an important fishery in the south. The Chesapeake Bay area is famous for them and can't keep up with the demand. Most crabs served in Asheville, NC restaurants come from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana and Asia. That's right – Asia. Out of the 1.5 tons of crabs consumed each year, about 20 percent (660 pounds) are made entirely of one species of crab – the Japanese Blue Crab. Also known by several other names, you will find it listed most commonly as "blue swimming crab" on labels. The Japanese Blue Crab is similar in size and shape to Virginia Blue Crabs but with some distinct differences in appearance. The Japanese Blue Crab ranges from northern Japan and Korea, south through Malaysia and all the way into India. The Blue Swimming Crab is an important aquaculture in the entire region.

Crabs Are Versatile

The versatility of crab, along with its succulent and sweet flavor, helps to make it popular among Asheville's restaurants. Crab is prepared in a plethora of ways, worldwide. Some are even eaten whole, like Pea Crabs and the Softshell Crabs of the southern coast.

Mostly you only eat the legs and claws, especially with the larger species like Snow Crabs. A few, like the Blue Crab, are eaten body and all. Blue Crabs are also found on the west coast of Central America where they are thought to be too difficult to eat (they have larger crabs there too). Even the orange roe of mature females can be eaten and are quite the delicacy. Anyone who has had a rich and

creamy bowl of She Crab Soup can attest. Spices are often associated with crabs.

In India they make Masala Crab, a kind of crab curry. In Thailand and across southeast Asia, they make Chili Crab, crabs stir-fried in a hot wok with fiery chilies, ginger and fish sauce. Some popular crab dishes you can find at Fisherman's Quarter II include crab cakes, deviled crab and Snow Crab Legs

Crab Preparation

Crabs are easy to prepare. For most, you will find your crabs or crab meat already cooked. This meat has been steamed and either left in the shell or picked and packaged. You just take it home and add it to your favorite recipe. For the lucky ones who are able to acquire or catch your own, simply steam the crabs and pick out that delicious meat. Yum!