

Published January 20th, 2010

## Crab Catch!

By Susie Iventosch



Bruno Bartolini, seafood expert at Diablo Foods in Lafayette Photo Susie Iventosch  
meat and is always available fresh during the season.

Many of you may recognize Bruno Bartolini, one of the many helpful faces behind the seafood counter at Diablo Foods in Lafayette. Though semi-retired, Bartolini is just as often at work, helping customers and teaching them the ins and outs of the seafood industry. In the business for 40 years, he has both wholesale and retail experience under his belt and he knows a lot about seafood, especially crab.

"Seafood is my specialty," he says. "For any question you have, I have the answer!"

According to Bartolini, there are several different types of crab, such as the blue crab, which doesn't have much meat and is used more for its flavor in dishes like gumbo. There is also soft-shell crab, where the entire crab – shell and all – is eaten. Then there is the Alaskan king crab, which is very meaty, but is always frozen. He prefers the Dungeness crab, named after a town in Washington State, which has sweeter

"The crab from Eureka and north looks very good this year," Bartolini said. "They are coming in at 2.25 to 2.5 pounds, whereas the local waters are producing crabs of smaller size, about 1.5 to 1.75 pounds."

And despite a sluggish economy, crab is still on the menu in many homes.

"We sold between 7,000 and 8,000 pounds of crab for Christmas this year, alone," Bartolini said. "We had a crew of 14 people for two days prior to Christmas just to clean and crack the crab for the orders we had!"

He says it's like this every year at the holidays, but, crab is very popular all the way through June. Customers can always call ahead for orders, to save time.

Dungeness crab season opens in November or December and typically runs through June.

"Exclusive Fresh out of Half Moon Bay specially selects crab for us," Bartolini noted. "They bring in about 1,000 pounds per haul and keep them live in tanks onboard the ship. Then they cook the crab back at the plant for about 20 minutes in boiling water with rock salt. Immediately, they immerse them in an ice bath."

Although most people purchase cooked crab, for those folks who prefer to order live crab, or if they dive for crab themselves, Bartolini offers a little trick he's perfected over the years.

"Sometimes if you boil live crab, they start fighting in the pot, which can result in lost legs," Bartolini pointed out. "Most people don't like that for presentation purposes. So I recommend placing the crab in the freezer for about 10 to 20 minutes, which slows down the metabolism and keeps them from fighting."

Bartolini also has his own idea of the best way to serve crab once cooked. This week we are featuring Bruno's recipe along as well as a crab dip recipe. Bon Appetit!

## Gigi's Crab Dip



Gigi's Crab Dip Photo Susie Iventosch

### Directions

Mix all ingredients and serve cold with crackers, or spread on baguette slices and broil for a hot hors d'oeuvres. My grandmother used to serve this dip in mini-ice cream cones for cocktail parties. These are available at Whole Foods in the ice cream aisle. Be sure to use the regular, flat-bottomed cones, not the sugar cones!

Gigi's Crab Dip Photo Susie Iventosch

## Bruno's Cracked Crab



Photo Susie Iventosch

Photo Susie Iventosch

Reach the reporter at: [suziven@gmail.com](mailto:suziven@gmail.com)

This recipe comes from my grandmother's recipe file. She loved to cook and entertain, so it's always fun to read the notes marked on the recipe cards. Grandmothers' recipe boxes should be considered national treasures, as they not only offer a folkloric anthropology of the times, but also serve as a living history of dining and entertaining trends. This recipe makes a wonderful base for crab cakes, too. All you need to do is add an egg and some bread crumbs, along with diced celery and parsley, and voila, you've got crab cake batter.

### Ingredients

- 1/2 pound fresh crab meat
- 1/4 cup chopped water chestnuts
- 2 tablespoons finely sliced green onions (sauteed or raw)
- 2 tablespoons mayonnaise
- 2 teaspoons Louisiana Hot Sauce
- Juice of half lemon
- 1/2 teaspoon New Mexico Chili powder
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt (if needed)

### Ingredients

- 1 large whole fresh crab, cracked and cleaned
- Marinade:
  - 1/4 cup really good olive oil
  - Juice of one lemon
  - 1 tablespoon fresh chopped garlic
  - 2 tablespoons fresh chopped Italian parsley
  - 1/4 cup good white wine

### Directions

Rinse and dry crab and place in a large bowl. Whisk the marinade ingredients together. Pour marinade over crab and toss well. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for one hour, or longer. Toss again. Eat with lots of bread and butter!