

Crazy for Crab: Everything You Need to Know to Enjoy Fabulous Crab at Home

Fred Thompson

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This generous compendium of crab know-how and dishes will make all crab scuttle furiously for cover. The author opens with a story about his first taste of crab at an adult sunset party. At age ten, "I was like a buzzard, swooping down on the bowl of claws and hightailing it like crazy. ... So started a thirty-plus-year love of the most cantankerous beast in the sea."

Although in America this crustacean is most popular along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, Thompson feels that crab's reign has finally come. He calls it a national delicacy and proves it with pages of crab lore and lust, 118 crab recipes, nine supportive recipes and forty bright color photos. The recipes use crab in everything from classic crab cakes, crab boil, chowders and soups to more exotic curry, eggs Benedict, quiche, quesadillas, and pot-stickers. Thompson proves that crab, although cranky, is a most flexible crustacean.

Author of two cookbooks, columnist for the Raleigh News & Observer, food stylist, and culinary developer, Thompson begins each recipe with a paragraph of friendly chat on the recipe's contributors, history, extra information for cooks, and his own views. The recipes are mostly clear and well written with minor missteps. For example, these instructions, in a recipe for Crab-Filled Pot Stickers with Honey-Ginger Dipping Sauce might be a wee bit fuzzy for novice cooks: "Pull each wrapper up around the filling, crimping the dough, but do not cover the top; the filling should come to the top of the wrapper."

Thompson devotes several pages to defining the types and grades of crab from blue crab, Dungeness, Alaskan king, snow, and soft shell crab to Jonah, rock, and stone claw crab. His thirteen-plus crab cake recipes and trick for finding shells and cartilage (spread crabmeat on a sheet pan and pass it under a broiler for a minute until the shells turn white and easy to spot) will be worth the price of the book to a crab lover.

Thompson's extensive information will lead cooks into their kitchens, a crab in one hand and this book in the other. With unexpected dishes like Soft Shell Crab Club Sandwich, Crab and Corn Cakes with Chipotle Mayonnaise, Apple Coconut Crab Chowder, and Crab-Mango Cucumber Rounds, readers are sure to find dishes to suit everyone. Crabs beware.

NANCY K. ALLEN (May / June 2004)

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