

# Consuming Thoughts

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When someone mentions hard shell crabs this time of the year, my mouth starts to water. Eating this prized crustacean — the Blue Crab, truly is a unique dining experience.

It is the sort of feasting that you either like or dislike. Liking hard shell crabs indicates a willingness to roll up your sleeves, get your hands messy, and sit for hours and pick succulent crab meat from the highly seasoned hard red shells.

Watermen around the Chesapeake Bay and Eastern shores of Maryland harvest Blue Crabs dur-

ing the spring and early summer when crabs migrate there.

Live Blue Crabs purchased by bushel are primarily male crabs, known locally as "jimmys." The female crabs, or "sooks," are usually sent to the crab houses and sold as picked meat. Live Blue Crabs are sold as: Jumbos, #1 Jimmys, and Medium crabs. They also may be purchased as medium and large crabs. To be harvested, they must have a legal minimum shell size of five inches from point to point.

Blue Crabs are marketed as

both hard shells and soft shells. Soft shell crabs are considered a delicacy. The entire body of the soft shell may be eaten after dressing and cooking. You can catch your own Blue Crabs, as do some of our friends in Maryland, or you can purchase them live or cooked.

In addition they are steamed and sold as fresh, canned or pasteurized crab meat.

Because of the difficulty in picking the meat from the shell and the time it consumes, many people buy crab meat that is cooked, picked and ready to eat.

Picked crab meat is available in several forms. The four most common are lump, backfin, special and claw. Lump or jumbo lump, is the large white lumps of meat that come from the area of the body adjacent to the back fin appendage. Backfin consists of some lumps plus other meat from the body. Special, also called regular or flake, is the white meat without any lumps. Claw meat is often brownish in color and is used in recipes where a white appearance is not important.

Be especially careful in hand-

ling crab meat. Keep live crabs alive until ready to cook. Discard any that die. When storing cooked crab meat, place the container in ice and refrigerate it.

Fresh crab meat should be white or off-white color when purchased. It should have a fresh odor, a light "ocean" aroma. Once it starts to deteriorate, if takes on a "sour" smell, then ammonia. Once the ammonia is detected the crab meat should be discarded.

Pasteurized crab meat may be kept unopened in the refrigerator for up to six months, but once it is opened it has a shelf life of only 3-5 days. Canned crab meat needs no refrigeration as long as it is un-

opened.

Picked crab meat does not freeze well, primarily due to texture changes. It is best to freeze the whole cooked, cleaned body of the crab, along with the claws. Use frozen crabs within three months.

Before using picked crab meat, always examine it for shell fragments. Pick up a small amount at a time and feel it carefully. Handle it gently so that you don't break the pieces apart.

Whether you like to pick and eat hard shells, or make or buy prepared Maryland Crab cakes, or crab soup, you'll enjoy the finest shellfish from the tidal waters.

## Quilt Exhibition

WINCHESTER, Va. — The Winchester Rotary Club will sponsor "The Quilts of Virginia" Exhibition at Daniel Morgan Middle School in Winchester, Va. on August 4-7. The exhibition will run in conjunction with Belle Grove Plantation's presentation of "A Century of Quilting" at Shenandoah University on the same dates.

The exhibition will present a sampling of Virginia's rich quilt heritage, with approximately 40

quilts on display. The quilts will be on loan from private collectors throughout Virginia. Visitors will have the opportunity to examine quilting techniques and fashions of the 19th and 20th centuries and to explore the history of quilting in Virginia.

The exhibition will be open to the public and will run from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. each day. Admission will be \$3.50. All net proceeds will be returned to various community charities via the Rotary Club.

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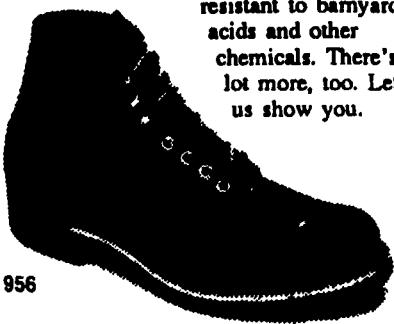
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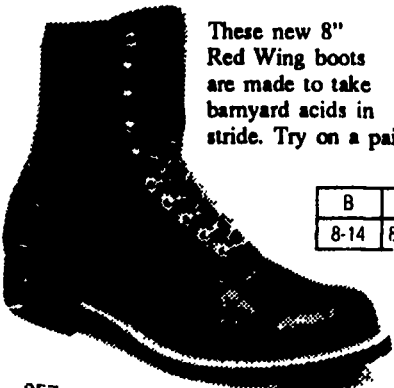


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