

Santa Barbara Fish Market owner Brian Colgate shows off some of the local crab bounty.



LET THEM EAT CRAB!

BY LYNETTE LA MERE

Photo by Eliot Crowley

James Beard described crab as a 'meal the gods intended only for the pure in palate.' Everyone loves eating these bizarre ten legged crustaceans once they get going. Its fun, fresh, delicious, light fare, although cooking fresh crabs can be a bit intimidating to the home cook, they're very easy to prepare and make a good Saturday afternoon leisurely project. Head for the pier, Farmer's Market or one of the local fish merchants and figure on getting 20 to 25% cooked crab meat from each pound of whole, raw crab you buy. Use live crabs on the same day purchased. Simply tell the gang we've over eaten all the easy things and it's time to earn dinner!

The real news is that Crab is still an environmentally sound seafood source and a good toxin free food as long as you don't eat the organs or viscera. These hearty fellows are flourishing like the spiders in Montecito. Both the National Resources Defense Council and Environmental Defense give eating crabs the thumbs up. Red, brown and yellow Rock Crabs and Spider Crabs are more abundant than ever on our coastline and are available year round and can be had for an average of 3.95 a pound from the local fish market. Dungeness crab, Blue crab, Snow crab and Alaskan king crab cost more but they have more accessible meat, meaning they're a bit less work.

Whole crabs are best boiled in a large pot of salted water (shoot for a saltiness similar to that of the ocean), after it returns to a boil cook them for 15 to 25 minutes depending on the size of the crabs. If popping live crabs into boiling water bothers you, try freezing them first for an hour, apparently it stuns or numbs them. When their done pull off the back and clean the viscera out under a heavy stream of water, melt some butter, toss a salad, spread out some newspapers on the table, a nut cracker & dinner is served.

Supermarket variety canned crab tends to get poor reviews and I can't recommend it. If you'd like to try some of these recipes without cooking the fresh crabs first I suggest going to the Harbor & getting some cleaned shelled, fresh local crab from the guys there at the Santa Barbara Fish Market, Brian says they often have spider crab shelled now and that's delicious. The canned jumbo lump crab by Chicken of the Sea is very good too.

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COOKING AT HOME

(continued)

Hot Crab and Artichoke Dip

This recipe is the reason I started this column, people keep asking me for it, I know its old school but there's a reason it's still around, people devour it.

- 12 oz. **Artichoke hearts**, not marinated or vinegar based
- 1 **red bell pepper**, finely chopped
- 2 Tb. **butter**
- 2 Tb. **flour**
- 1-1/4 cup **half & half**
- 3 **green onions**, sliced thin
- 2 oz **parmesan cheese**
- 1-1/2 tsp. **lemon juice**
- 1-1/2 Tb. **drained, pickled jalapeños**, minced
- 1/2 tsp. **salt**
- 1/4 tsp. **celery seed**
- 1 pound **crab meat**, picked over
- 1/4 tsp. **pepper**

Top garnish;
2 oz. additional **parmesan cheese**

Drain the artichoke hearts well and finely chop them. Sauté red bell peppers five minutes and set aside. Make a roux with flour and butter. This is easy stuff, just cook it down in a sauté pan until deep gold, add the half & half and then reduce to thicken. Gently stir together the rest in the order given off the heat. Transfer to a vegetable sprayed or buttered six cup baking/ serving vessel, and top with additional parmesan cheese garnish. You can hold it here in the refrigerator to bake later if you'd like. Bake at 375 degrees for 20-30 minutes or till bubbly & golden.

Beautiful Crab and Blood Orange Salad

4 generous entrée servings

With pale butter lettuce as a back drop this is a gorgeous meal and the dressing is very popular, a wonderful showcase for our locally grown blood oranges but if you can't get them regular oranges will do fine.

- 2 large heads **butter lettuce**, washed, dried and torn
 - 1 lb. **crab meat**, picked over
 - 4 **blood oranges**, peel & pith cut off, sections gently cut out
 - 2 **ripe avocados**
- Blood Orange Vinaigrette (recipe follows)

Toss the lettuce with Orange Vinaigrette (you'll have some left over; it holds well) and top with crab, orange sections and avocado slices. Season lightly with salt & pepper.

Blood Orange Vinaigrette

Makes 3 cups.

Before you juice the oranges remove 2 teaspoons of the zest with a microplane zester.

- 1 cup fresh squeezed **blood orange juice**
- 1/2 cup **rice wine vinegar**
- 1/4 cup **frozen orange juice concentrate**
- 1/4 cup **honey**
- 2 Tb. **Dijon mustard**
- 1 tsp. **allspice**
- 1 tsp. **salt**
- 1/2 tsp. **pepper**
- 1-1/3 cup **vegetable oil**
- 2 tsp. **blood orange zest**

Put all the ingredients in a blender and emulsify for several minutes.

Crab Enchiladas with Salsa Verde

- 12 oz. **crab meat**, picked over
 - 1 bunch **green onions**, chopped
 - 3 oz. **Monterey jack cheese**
 - 12 **corn tortillas**
- Salsa Verde (recipe follows)

Garnish;
8 oz. **sour cream**
1 bu. **Cilantro**

Blend together the crab, green onions and cheese. Heat the salsa verde in a sauté pan and dip the tortillas in with tongs to soften them filling and rolling them up one by one. Set them out seam side down in a baking pan lined with a thin layer of the salsa. Top with more salsa and more jack cheese if you like and bake in a 350 degree oven till hot, about 20 minutes. Serve with sour cream and cilantro garnish.

Salsa Verde

Quick and easy to prepare; far superior to the canned or jarred variety.

- 2 lb. **tomatillos**, remove the loose skins and boil ten minutes
- 3 **Serrano chilies** (for less heat use 2)
- 1 bu. **cilantro**
- 1 **clove garlic**
- pinch **salt**

Drain the tomatillos, coarsely chop the rest of the ingredients and process in a blender.

Crab and Wild Mushroom Torte

An outstanding dish with cocktails, serve warm or room temperature with lots of sliced baguettes and a crisp white wine. Also decadent in wedges with a salad.

For the Crust;

- 1 ¼ cup **fresh French bread crumbs**
- 1 cup (3oz) **parmesan, grated**
- 6 Tb. **butter**, melted

For the Filling;

- 1 Tb. **olive oil** to sauté
- 1 cup chopped **onion**
- 1 cup chopped **red bell pepper**
- 4 cup (.65lb) **wild mushrooms**,
remove stems and chop
*Save one cluster of mushrooms for centerpiece
top décor if serving whole.*

- 1.5 lb **cream cheese**, room temperature
- 2 tsp. **salt**
- 1 tsp. **pepper**
- 4 **eggs**
- 1/2 cup **cream**
- 10 oz. **crab meat**, picked over
- 4 oz. **smoked Gouda**, grated
- 1/2 cup **fresh parsley**

For after baking top crust;

- 1/4 cup each; **parmesan, parsley**
& **bread crumbs**

Pre heat the oven to 350 degrees, vegetable spray a 9x2 inch spring form pan.

Blend together the crust and press into the bottom of the pan only and prebake it for 15 minutes, and then cool.

Sauté the onion and pepper for 2 minutes, add the mushrooms, and continue to sauté for 10 minutes and then cool.

Beat cream cheese and salt & pepper until fluffy. Add the eggs and cream. Fold in the sautéed mushrooms, onions and peppers, Gouda, crab and parsley. Pour over the crust. Bake on a baking sheet for 1hour and 30 minutes until cake puffs and browns well on top but still moves in center slightly when shaken. Remove from the oven for a moment and top with top crust. Pop it back in the oven till done, another ten minutes. This can be served or refrigerated and holds well and served later at room temperature.

LYNETTE LA MERE is the proprietor of Pure Joy Catering, Inc (805) 963-5766 (www.PureJoyCatering.com) and a freelance writer who flourishes in Santa Barbara.

Shopping hints: All ingredients appear in **bold-faced type** and can be found at Farmer's Market, The Saturday Fisherman's Market or the Santa Barbara Fish Market, both in the Harbor.



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