



## *A PROPER BOIL*

by Harold Mangum

Raised in Louisiana, where crawfish boils got their start, I learned to perfect the process. Breaking down the basics for you, I will save you all of the mistakes, burns and bites I made. So, pick up the necessities, find a reputable dealer for your mud bugs and send out the invites

### **ITEMS NEEDED:**

120 quart pot  
A 36-48 inch  
stirring paddle  
Water  
Seasoning  
Vegetables (see items below)  
Lively, fresh and in-season crawfish  
Newspapers

### **SETTING UP FOR THE BOIL**

It's possible to get a good boiling setup package for under \$100 if you already have a propane tank and gas. However, if you are the over-achiever of the group, it's better to buy a first-class jet burner and then add the other pieces you need. For backyard use, I recommend a 50,000 BTU burner and a regulator, which is a device that will stop the flow of propane if the line ruptures--this is a must. The height of the burner is also important. It should not have a high center of gravity in case anyone bumps into it. Lower, shorter burners can be used either for frying turkeys or boiling crawfish so it can serve as a dual-purpose. Having a good size pot will allow for a large sack of crawfish in addition to the rest of the fixings. And last but not least, you will need a stainless steel paddle. Purchasing one from a restaurant supply chain works best, however, if you only have a wooden paddle, that will work just fine.

### **PURCHASING YOUR CRAWFISH - NO MUDDY BUGS**

The advice for buying crawfish is the same as for buying any kind of fish or seafood: Find a reputable dealer. Just because they are referred to as Mud Bugs, does not mean they need to be covered in mud. If they are muddy, do not purchase. They need to be nice and clean and preferably around the same size. This helps with having the crawfish cook all at the same time. I suggest you purchase 4 to 5 pounds of crawfish, per person. This is typical for a South Louisiana boil. People there can, and will, put them away. For the non-cajuns of the group, or people new to eating crawfish, plan for about 2 pounds per person.

### **A CHANCE OF SHOWERS?**

If you have to postpone your boil until the next day, don't purge your crawfish (soaking them in saltwater) it will kill them. Wash the crawfish right before boiling, by pouring salt over them in a washtub, then filling with fresh water and draining instantly. So, the last breath taken by the crustaceans is salt, you purge crabs, you wash crawfish. Then put them in a large plastic basket- strainer and hose them down thoroughly.

### **SEASONING YOUR CRAWFISH**

To start, I recommend a basic powdered boil seasoning. I prefer the boxed bags of Zatarain's, available in local supermarkets in regular or extra spicy. A 4-1/2 pound jar of seasoning is enough for 6 gallons of water. Follow the directions on the box for the correct amount and remember that almost all off-the-shelf seasonings already contain salt, so you may or may not have to add extra.

---

### **PICKING THE PERFECT VEGETABLE**

6 Lemons, cut in half  
5 bulbs of garlic, sliced in half, exposing the cloves  
6 onions, sliced in half so the top and root ends hold the onions together  
2-3 lb. bag of small, red potatoes  
16 corn on the cob (frozen)

---

The potatoes will need more time to cook, so boil all vegetables with the exception of the corn. Larger potatoes can be cut in half, but they will absorb more seasoning and may fall apart faster. The trick is in the timing! The vegetables need to cook long enough to be soft but not falling apart or disintegrating. The frozen corn is added later to cool down the boil.

### **TIMING AND COOKING**

Bring the covered pot of water and seasonings to a hard rolling boil, which takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Then, dump in the crawfish and stir it several times. Cover and check periodically to see when it comes back to a boil, you want to see bubbles over most of the surface but short of a hard, rolling boil and then cut off the flame. **NOTE:** Let it sit about three to five minutes for large sized crawfish, and then add the frozen corn. That will start cooling the water down and it keeps the corn intact, otherwise, the kernels fall off the cob. After corn is added, stir and check until the crawfish sink, once sunk, they have absorbed all the flavor they'll absorb. The trick is to make sure they're not overdone by the time they sink. The soak takes roughly 30 minutes.

### **TESTING, STIRRING AND MORE TESTING**

Stirring the pot releases heat so stir well. Then, pull up a few crawfish to taste test. Peel the tail to feel and bite to see how firm it is. If it has a rubbery texture, the tail meat is not cooked enough. If it's falling apart, it's overcooked, you want firm crawfish, so right between those two extremes. It's obvious the more time they soak, the juicier the heads are. When cooked perfectly, use a strainer to gather the crawfish and vegetables out of the boiler.

### **TIME TO SERVE**

Spread a thin, disposable table cover to help aid in cleanup. Then lay a thick layer of newspapers, pour the crawfish and vegetables on top and dig in.

### **LET'S EAT**

If you know how to peel a shrimp, you can peel crawfish. Break the crawfish at the natural spot in the middle. For diehard crawfish lovers, suck the juices from the crawfish head. Then, peel off the larger part of the shell around the tail and pinch the end to make the rest of the tail meat pop right out.

### **LEFTOVERS AND REHEATING**

If you have really good friends, they'll stay and help you peel the leftover crawfish to make étouffée the next day. Scoop leftovers into gallon-sized re-sealable bags or large containers and promptly refrigerate. Cooked crawfish are, of course, fantastic in dozens of dishes. From a simple salad with a remoulade dressing to leftover boiled potatoes to make fantastic potato salad, many recipes can be made. To reheat whole, unpeeled crawfish and vegetables the next day, put them in a metal colander or steamer over a big pot of boiling water until heated through, you now have the tools and directions needed to give a boil a try. But we must warn you, once you do this for your friends and family, you're taking the chance of being the annual crawfish boil host.

### **SECRET!**

One of my secrets is to add a cup of powdered celery to the boil. I also add about a tablespoon of liquid boil seasoning. Be careful not to add too much, it's potent.