



**The
CRAYFISH TALE
By TRAPPER ARNE**

EATING CRAYFISH FOR CHRISTMAS

When I grew up in Sweden, you only ate crayfish in August or maybe in September. As the regulations at the time decreed that you could only catch and sell crayfish during those months, people had no other choice.

Since that era things have changed. With the advance of kitchen freezer technology, you are now able to freeze your catch and eat it whenever you so desire, even for Christmas or New Years. Fishing regulations in Sweden also changed making it legal to catch, sell and, consequently, to eat crayfish whenever the spirit moved you.

In spite of this, Swedes, and that includes me, seem to prefer to eat crayfish in August. What other month lends itself better to hanging the colored lanterns on the porch in the light of a harvest moon while eating, singing and imbibing, during a crayfish party?

There are also other reasons why August is a good month for eating crayfish. If they were caught during that month, female crayfish are more likely to contain roe, which is a delicacy in the opinion of many crayfish aficionados. When I visited my favorite crayfish lake in the middle of September, I enjoyed an unusually large catch of females with roe, and when I feasted on that catch, I had a plate filled with nothing but roe filled crayfish, to my gustatory delight.

COOKING CHRISTMAS CRAYFISH

There are many ways to enjoy crayfish. In addition to catching them while camping at a high altitude pristine lake, there is also the enjoyment of eating them in the company of friends. But how do you cook crayfish for the maximum enjoyment?

This 'HOW' has numerous answers. Cookbooks are full of recipes for cooking crayfish, lobster, crab and shrimp. Being a Swede by age old habit, I tend to prefer preparing them the way my mother did. No surprise here. Just add half a cup of salt to a gallon of water and dump the crays in roiling water. After boiling resumes, cook for 7-8 more minutes and you're done. Don't fall for the myth that crayfish are done just because they have turned red. They must be cooked longer than that.

But talk to people down in Cajun country, and you will never hear mentioned this way of coking crayfish. Here they talk about crawfish etouffee and see food gumbo, jambalaya crayfish pie with Zatarain's etouffee mix. The traditional

crawfish boil includes corn, potatoes and onions in addition to the spices. Some even add mushrooms and smoked sausages. The Internet is full of exotic crawfish recipes. My crayfish catching friend by a Colorado River lagoon enjoys his crawfish etouffee. Here is an etouffee recipe straight from a Louisiana web site:

First the ingredients:

1 cup celery - 1 cup green bell pepper - 1 cup onion - 1 cup chicken stock - 1 pound crawfish tails - 1/2 cup tomato sauce - 1/2 cup unsalted butter - 1/4 cup all purpose flour - 1/4 cup fresh parsley - 1/4 cup scallions - 1/4 teaspoon black pepper - 1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper - 1/4 teaspoon salt - 2 cloves garlic – cooked rice.

And here is how you fix it:

- 1. Melt butter in large skillet. Add celery, onion, green pepper, and garlic; cook 5 minutes stirring occasionally. Sprinkle in flour. Cook an additional 5-10 minutes, stirring often, until vegetables are tender and roux is a medium brown color.**
- 2. Add chicken stock and tomato sauce; mixing well. Cook, stirring often, until bubbly and slightly thickened.**
- 3. Add crawfish tails. Bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and cook 10 minutes (or until crawfish are tender) on low heat, stirring occasionally.**
- 4. Add salt, pepper, and cayenne to taste.**
- 5. Add scallions and parsley. Simmer for a few minutes, covered, to blend seasonings.**
- 6. Serve over rice.**

Not being much of a cook myself, I find that recipe rather demanding, but to each his own. If you know your way around the kitchen mysteries, it may not be much of a problem. What really makes me hesitate to use this recipe is that by requiring first to have the tails shelled before adding to the rest of the ingredients, you are in essence leaving most of the work to the cook of the house. If you eat crayfish the Swedish way, my way, you leave most of the work to the person who does the eating, me.

Trapper Arne