

Blue Crab Shedding

Mortality During Summer Months

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Soft shell crabs in Louisiana are generally available from March through November, with most productivity between May and September. However, crab mortality is also higher during the summer months, particularly July through August. This may be attributed to the overcrowding of crabs, high water temperature and low dissolved oxygen.

As crab density and water temperatures increase, the ability for water to hold oxygen decreases. Dissolved oxygen levels will be most problematic in systems with higher salinities. Monitoring dissolved oxygen and maintaining oxygen levels at or above 5 milligrams per liter (5 mg/L; in the shedding trays and sump) will reduce mortality due to low oxygen.

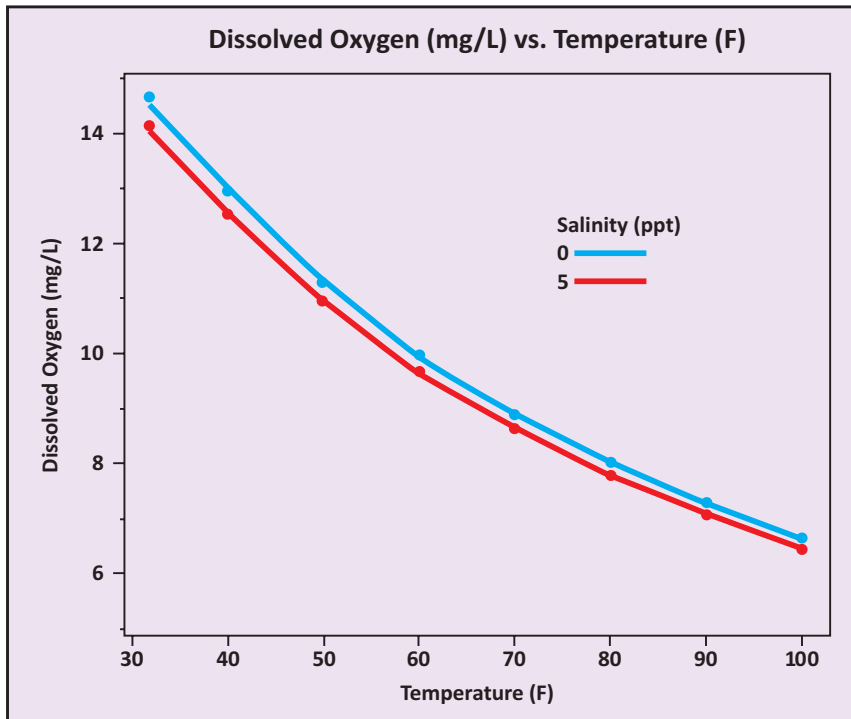
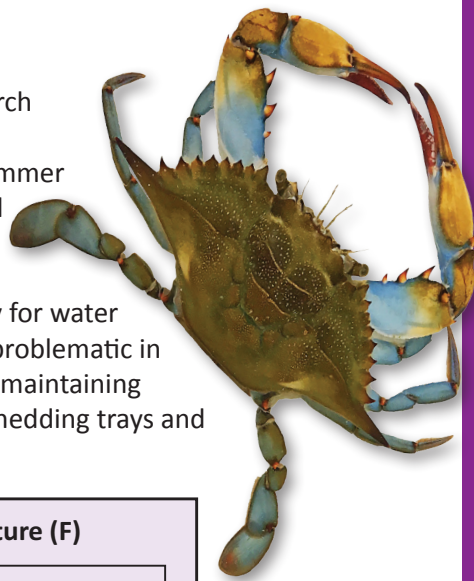


Figure 1: As temperatures increase, water cannot hold the same levels of dissolved oxygen.

Monitoring dissolved oxygen (DO) with a meter instead of a chemical test is more reliable and easier to use.



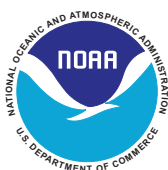
Monitoring dissolved oxygen with a meter

Using a spray bar in your shedding system will increase aeration. If low oxygen persists, adding an aerator to your sump will also increase oxygen concentration in your water. Refer to factsheet "The Components of Recirculated Systems" for more information.



A spray bar will increase aeration

Monitoring and maintaining stable temperatures in shedding systems also reduces mortality. Peeler crabs appear in crab harvests when water temperatures are above 65°F. Successful shedding operations typically maintain water temperatures between 70°F and 80°F. Temperatures above this range, or large daily temperature fluctuations, tend to stress peeler crabs, increasing mortality. To reduce high temperatures and temperature fluctuations, consider housing a shedding system under a shaded structure or indoors. Shedders can also increase the amount of water within their shedding system to reduce temperature fluctuations.



<http://www.laseagrant.org/outreach/projects/soft-shell-crab/>

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