

Blue Crab Shedding

Handling Peeler & Buster Crabs

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Handling of peeler crabs during harvest and transport is important for successful shedding.

Molting is naturally stressful. Peeler crabs that experience the least amount of stress and physical damage are more likely to survive the process.

Harvest:

Some harvesting methods used to collect peeler crabs can reduce damage to the crab.

Preferred gear:

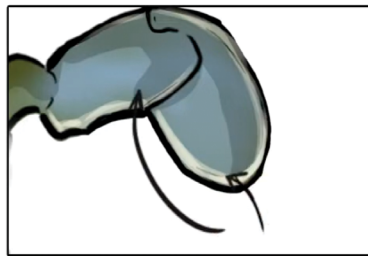
- Hand lines
- Dip nets
- Trotlines

Removing crabs from hard crab pots is stressful and often causes physical damage. Shaking crab pots to remove crabs and dumping peelers on top of each other can cause puncture wounds and limb loss.

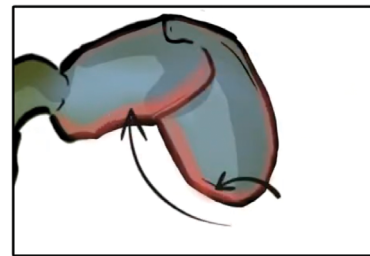
Pink to red liners should be the focus of harvest (see illustration below). Greenies and white liners are less likely to successfully survive a molt.



GREENIE

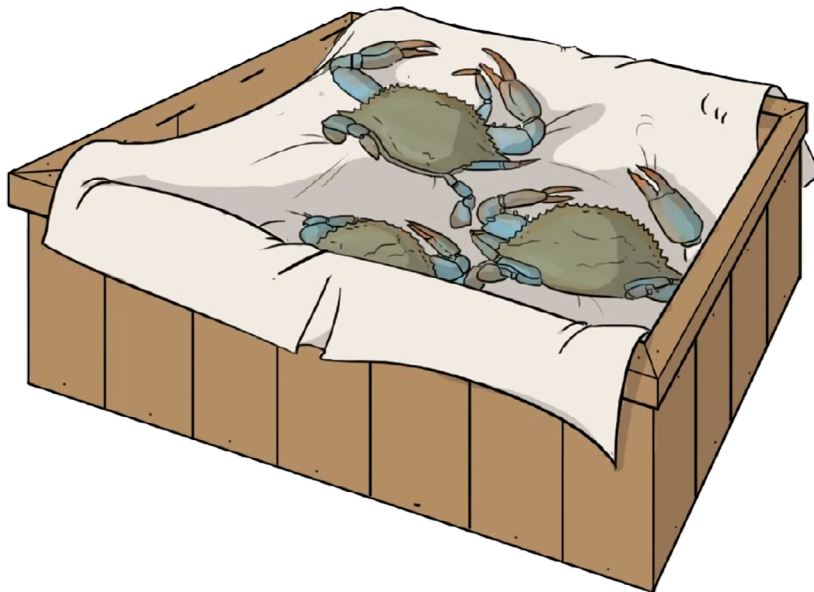


WHITE LINERS

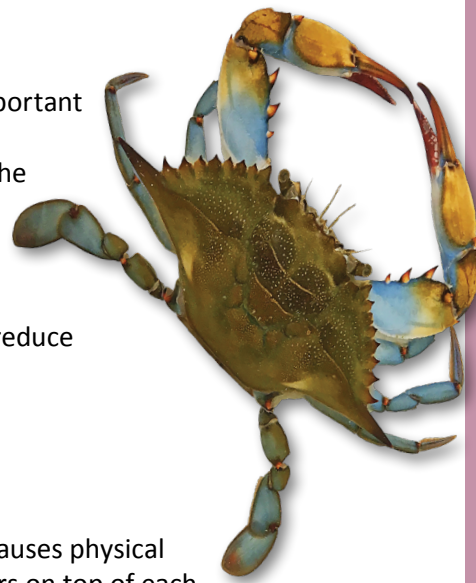


PINK TO RED LINER

Harvested peeler crabs should be in shallow boxes or baskets with a layer of moist burlap or old towels to keep crabs cool, wet and to reduce injury. The use of a shallow container helps prevent the over-packing and crushing of crabs. Crabs should be packed in containers right side up and not thrown together.



Containers should be kept in a shaded area, out of direct sunlight. In Louisiana, containers must be labeled as “peeler” or “buster” for legal harvest. The burlap or towel covering should remain moist during transit. Do not transport crabs in standing water.





If peeler crabs are being shipped to shedding facilities, keeping crabs cool is essential. It is recommended that crabs be transported in an insulated container and kept at about 50 °F. This puts crabs in a state of lethargy, which reduces stress and helps prevent damage. Shipping crabs with frozen ice packs or gel packs will keep them cool. To prevent crabs from getting too cold, a moist towel should be used to separate the crabs from the cold packs.

To reduce the stress of crabs:

- Do not stack crabs on top of one another
- Limit the movement of the container they are being transported in
- Limit the number of times you move crabs from one container to another

If you need to change containers, each crab should be moved one at a time and not dumped from one container into another. This will reduce damage to the crab.

High quality peelers that survive transport and have minimal physical damage helps increase fishermen's profits and increases crab shedding operations' success.

For a video, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=HOGnMmJpNtk.



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

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