

Identifying Peeler and Buster Crabs

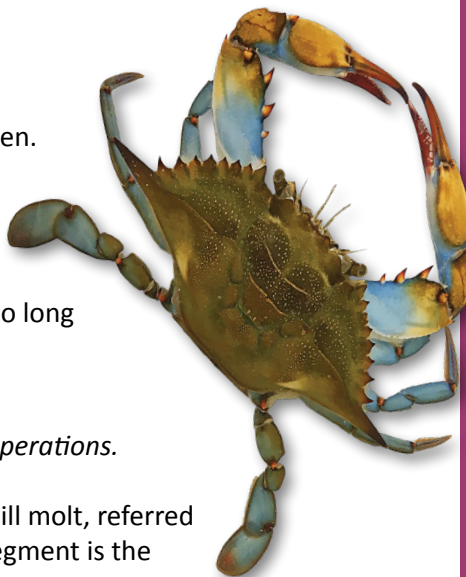
Peeler or “buster” crabs are hard shell crabs that show signs of molting. Selling peelers can generate extra money for fishermen. Identifying crabs about to molt is key to successful soft-shell crab production.

Only put crabs that are close to molting in the shedding system to decrease chances of mortality, maintain water quality and decrease operation costs. Crabs kept in shedding systems too long will get box burn - discolorations on their shell.

Identifying shell color changes

Note: Mature female crabs should not be used in shedding operations. Sexually mature females do not molt.

Paddle fin color is a common indicator of how soon a crab will molt, referred to as white, pink or red liners. The bottom edge of the second segment is the easiest place to detect this color change.



*Red line crab.
Note the red edge of the bottom of the segment in the circle.*

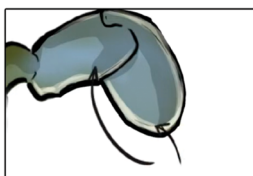
A white line crab will molt in six to ten days. Avoid putting white line crabs into the shedding system as their health often declines in the system, they are more likely to cannibalize other crabs and they often experience high mortality during molting.

Crabs with a pink line will molt in four to six days.

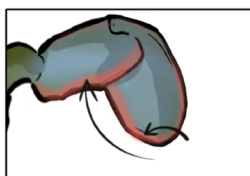
Crabs with a red line will molt in one to four days. These peelers are optimal and have the best chance for success.



Crab not close to molting



White liner.



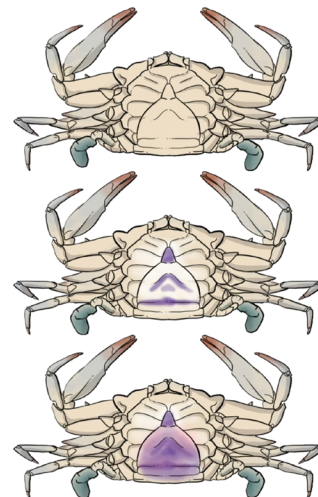
Red liner

Molt Stage	Days from Shedding
White Liners	6-14 days
Pink Liners	4-6 days
Red Liners	1-4 days
Cracked Red Liner	Less than 1 day

Red line crabs that have cracked shells along their face, lateral spines and carapace or shell are referred to as cracked red liners. Some use the term “buster” to refer to cracked red liners.



Immature females will exhibit a change in abdominal color prior to molting. Their abdomens will change from a white/cream color to a grey/purple/pink color. Male crabs do not undergo an abdominal color change.



Identifying good quality peelers and busters can increase profit for fishermen and increase success of their shedding operations.

For a video on this topic, visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrll9lLb6Y



Examples of crabs close to molting



Crab with box burn from being in the system too long



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

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