

The problem is, crayfish are aliens and don't belong in Arizona. They were introduced purposely into a few Arizona reservoirs and other bodies of water decades ago, primarily as a food source for sport fish. Unfortunately, they have dispersed beyond those original sites on their own and have been accidentally (or intentionally) moved by humans to places they shouldn't be. How did they get there? Live crayfish kept as pets, used in classroom science lessons or as fishing bait are sometimes released into bodies of water by people who are unaware of the devastating impact on aquatic ecosystem. The result? Crayfish are invading previously pristine waters throughout Arizona.



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*Crayfish are not a native Arizona species, and at a number of sites their presence is having a negative impact on both sport fish and native species.*

### Why is this a problem?

Crayfish are a non-native species, which means they are not a natural part of any of Arizona's aquatic ecosystems. In a number of areas, they are negatively impacting sport-fishing opportunities, native species, and the aquatic ecosystems that support these species. They compete for habitat and resources with sport fish, as well as with

native fish, insects, frogs, snakes, turtles, and snails, and they ravenously consume submerged aquatic plants. They contribute to the decline of rare or declining species, such as the Chiricahua leopard frog and Three Forks springsnail, and they degrade our springs, streams, ponds, and other aquatic ecosystems. Streams and pools inhabited by crayfish are usually devoid of any submerged vegetation or a diversity of other living organisms, and the water is degraded by the silt they stir up.

### You can make a difference!

There are few simple things anglers, teachers, pet owners, crayfish connoisseurs, and others can do to help prevent the spread of crayfish.

- Don't transport live crayfish between bodies of water, or away from the site where captured (see the Arizona Fishing Regulations for current rules). You can, however, transport unlimited numbers of dead crayfish home, or to another site for use as bait.
- Don't release any extra live crayfish or other baitfish in your bait bucket into the body of water when you have finished fishing for the day. Extra live crayfish and baitfish should be humanely dispatched or given to another angler fishing at the site. Dumping your surplus crayfish and baitfish contributes to their spread, and could also spread parasites and pathogens such as chytrid fungus and whirling disease to sport fish and native species.
- Unwanted household or classroom pets should never be released into any body of water. Instead, crayfish should be returned to the place of purchase, given

to another responsible family or teacher, or humanely dispatched.

- Catch crayfish at every opportunity. They are a delicious source of protein and easy to prepare. The white tail and claw meat are comparable in taste to lobster, shrimp, and crab.

With your support, the Arizona Game and Fish Department can continue to provide quality sport-fishing opportunities, while protecting native species and aquatic ecosystems for future generations to enjoy.

### Crayfish Catching 101

Angling for crayfish is a great outdoor family activity, with near guaranteed success. Families who would like to try fishing for crayfish can purchase a Family Fishing License at any Department office at a significant savings. With an Arizona fishing license, you can catch unlimited numbers of crayfish every day of the year. Although there is no limiting season, Mother Nature tends to slow or stop crayfish activity during the colder months. Generally, crayfish seem to be most active between April and October, and in the warmer summer months, they tend to be most active at night.

Crayfish can be legally captured by a number of methods; some require active participation, while others take minimal effort. Legal methods of take include:

- A fishing pole, rod, or stick with a line and bait,
- Handheld dip nets,
- Minnow traps that are less than 24 inches in length and 12 inches or less in width or height,
- Seine nets less than 4 feet in height and

10 feet in length,

- Crayfish traps or nets that are less than 3 feet in any dimension (height, width, and depth).
- By hand or with any handheld, nonmotorized implement that does not fire a projectile.

Traps and nets can be homemade or manufactured, but they must conform to the aforementioned dimensions. Unattended traps must have a water-resistant identification tag legibly bearing the name, address, and fishing license number of the angler(s) using the trap. Laminated business cards or thin sheets of aluminum inscribed with the aforementioned information can be attached to the traps with wire, plastic fasteners, fishing line, string, bolts, or similar hardware.

The advantage of crayfish traps and nets over dip nets and fishing poles is that the traps can be set, left unattended, and checked later in the day or the next morning. However, all traps must be checked daily to remove the crayfish and release any fish or other aquatic animals accidentally

captured. Obviously, you will need some type of bait to entice crayfish into the trap. Raw, fatty meats such as chicken, pork, and hot dogs are proven crayfish attractants. Make sure you secure the bait in the center of the trap with fishing line, a twist tie, or a fish hook.

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## Where to Go?

Crayfish are distributed statewide, but fortunately they have not invaded every body of water. You can find them in canals, streams, bedrock pools, springs, ponds, livestock tanks, reservoirs, and lakes. The two species in Arizona seem to prefer places with a little rocky cover, aquatic vegetation, and still or slow-moving water. Some popular “crayfish fishing holes” include lakes Mary, Ashurst, Hawley, Woods Canyon, Apache, Horseshoe, Bartlett, Roosevelt, Canyon, Saguaro, and Pleasant; the countless streams and ponds in the

Tonto, Coconino, and Apache-Sitgreaves National forests; and the Colorado River.

## *Crayfish tail*

## *and claw*

## *meat can be*

## *substituted in*

## *many seafood*

## *recipes.*

Many waters that support sport fish also contain crayfish. Ask your angling friends about their favorite sites or check with the

Department’s Regional offices for

tips on finding your own special crayfish fishing hole.

## Taking Your Crayfish Home

You can catch and take home unlimited numbers of crayfish 365 days of the year. But remember, only dead crayfish can be legally transported away from the site where captured (see the Arizona Fishing Regulations for current rules). Crayfish can be killed quickly by thrusting a sharp knife between their head and thorax, or cutting



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*Connoisseurs of crayfish say it tastes best dipped in butter with a squeeze of lemon.*

off the head with wire cutters or tin snips. They can also be killed by covering them with ice or boiling them briefly in water. Regardless of the method you use, the carcass or meat should be treated like raw seafood and kept cold and clean at all times.

Cooking crayfish is easy whether you are at home in your kitchen, streamside, or lakeside. To cook them outdoors, all you need is some clean water, a propane stove, and a large pot with a tight-fitting lid. Before you boil your crayfish, rinse off any debris or mud with fresh water. Some crayfish connoisseurs prefer to “purge” their catch first. Purging cleans out the “vein,” otherwise known as the intestine. However, as with shrimp, the vein is easily removed before or after cooking. If you want to try purging your catch, add a half cup of salt or vinegar to a bucket of clean water, mix well, then add the crayfish. After 30 minutes or

so, the water will turn murky, which means it’s time to remove the crayfish.

Crayfish added to a pot of boiling water will cook up in about five minutes. When the body or tail turns bright red, they are ready to eat. For extra flavor, add garlic, peppers, lemon slices, crab/seafood boil, or other seasonings to the boiling water. Crayfish tail and claw meat can be substituted in many seafood recipes. They are delicious dipped in prepared cocktail sauce. Try adding a little of your favorite hot sauce to spice it up. Place any leftovers in a plastic bag and refrigerate or freeze them immediately for later use.

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*For additional information about crayfish in Arizona, visit the Arizona Game and Fish Department’s Web site at [azgfd.com](http://azgfd.com) or contact the Fisheries Branch at 602-789-3257, the Nongame Branch at 602-789-3500, or check with your nearest Regional office.*

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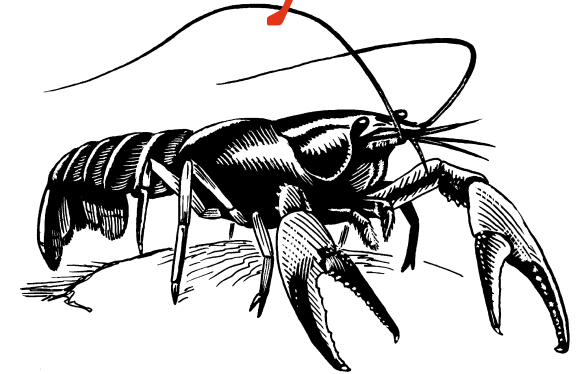
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# Crayfish



## Ugh and Yum!

*Whether you call them crayfish, crawfish, crawdads, or aquatic cockroaches, those little freshwater invertebrates that look like miniature lobsters have become a significant pest in many parts of Arizona.*



**Arizona Game and Fish Department**