Blue Crab - Soft Shell

Soft Shells are Blue Crabs (*Callinectes sapidus*) that have just molted but have not yet had their new shell harden. Soft Shells are a popular delicacy that are cooked whole and can be eaten with the shell. Blue Crabs are found in brackish water along the U.S. Atlantic Coast and the Gulf of Mexico. They are an important commercial and recreational fishery in Chesapeake Bay. They are wild-captured.

Blue Crabs grow by molting, or shedding their shell, and leaving a larger, soft shell for a covering that will harden. They may do this as many as 23 times during their 3 year life span. Crabs about to molt are called "peelers." Some fishermen capture peelers and hold them until they molt. Soft Shells must be caught within two hours of molting as the shell begins to harden at that point. Blue Crab females stop molting when they reach sexual maturity but males continue throughout their lives.

Soft Shells are a clean seafood as the Blue Crab with stop eating three days before it molts which means that its digestive system is naturally cleaned. The Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood WATCH® rates Blue Crab from the U.S. Chesapeake Bay trotline fishery as a “Best Choice” and the pot fisheries of the U.S. Atlantic Coast and Gulf of Mexico as a "Good Alternative." The scoopnet and crab ring fisheries in the Mexican area of the Gulf of Mexico are rated as "Good Alternative."

### Sources

**Species Name**
Callinectes sapidus

**Source**
Blue Crabs may be found from Nova Scotia to northern Argentina but are most commonly found from Massachusetts to Texas. They are popular in the Chesapeake Bay area. They are bottom dwellers that live in a variety of shallow coastal habitats.

**Seasonality**
Frozen Soft Shells are available year-round. Fresh Soft Shells are available during the summer with a peak in mid-May to mid-June.

**Fishing Method**
Soft Shells are wild-capture by traps, nets and dredges. Fishermen may hold wild-caught Blue Crabs that are about to molt in cages or tanks until they molt.

**Features**
**Flavor**

Soft Shells have a sweet, buttery, rich flavor and a crunchy texture as they are eaten with their shell.

**Dietary Information**

Per 100g raw, edible portion:
- Calories: 87
- Fat: 1.08g
- Saturated Fat: 0.222g
- Protein: 18.06g
- Sodium: 293mg
- Selenium: 37.4mcg
- Cholesterol: 78mg
- Omega-3: 0.320g

Source: USDA

**Appearance**

Soft Shells look like Blue Crabs, but have a softer shell.

**Form**

Soft Shells are available in both fresh and frozen form.

**Uses**

**Preparation**

Soft Shells may be fried, sautéed, broiled or grilled to make the shells crunchy.

**Substitution**

Soft Shells are a unique seafood and it is hard to find an adequate substitute. However, Flounder and Shrimp may work as a substitute.

**Handling**

Soft Shells should be refrigerated at 30-34 degrees F. Frozen Soft Shells should be kept frozen until prior to use. It is recommended to defrost in a perforated drip pan, to avoid sitting in water, in a 34-36 degrees refrigerator overnight to retain best quality. Do not refreeze or allow to sit in water.

**Market**

**Sizes and Cuts**

Soft Shells will be available in 1 dozen mini boxes in four sizes:
- Whales: 5½ inches and up
- Jumbos: 5–5½ inches
- Primes: 4½–5 inches
- Hotels: 4–4½ inches.
**Pricing Scale**
Soft Shells are considered a premium product and are highly desirable. The price fluctuates seasonally, and due to the short season, demand often exceeds supply. Due to market and currency fluctuations, please contact your Seattle Fish Company of New Mexico associate for up-to-date market information and current pricing information.

**Shelf Life**
Fresh Soft Shells which have been handled and stored properly should retain optimum quality for 1 to 2 days.

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