



# The Maryland Blue Crab

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## Identifying Crabs

You will need to know the crab's life stages when you go crabbing. Adult crabs are generally those you want to catch to eat - with a few exceptions. *To identify males from females, just turn them over!*



Male - Jimmy

The male crab, or jimmy, has blue claws and an underside "apron" which looks like an upside-down T or the "Washington Monument." Large male crabs are also called *channelers*.



Immature Female - She-Crab

The she-crab or immature female crab has an inverted V-shaped apron. Females have orange tipped claws.



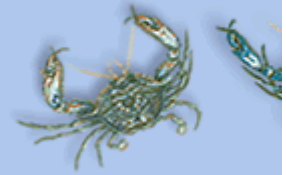
Mature Female - Sook

A mature female has a widened apron with a semicircular bell shape that looks like the U.S. Capitol building. She is called a **sook**.



Female with eggs - Sponge Crab

A **Sponge Crab** is a female that has an egg mass that looks like an orange sponge on her belly. Let these go, so there will be many productive crab harvests in the future.



## More Crab

The terms below are widely used, though in a few towns you may find they have a different vernacular.

- **Hardshells** have hard shells, usually within 4 days after molting.
- **Keeper** is a crab that is kept to eat, usually around 5 days old.
- **Peelers** are about to molt. They have a thin outer shell. Peelers you catch in April must be 3 1/4" if caught April 15 - 3 1/2" if caught July 15 - 4" if caught after July 15.
- **Busting** describes a crab that is molting and emerging from its old shell.
- **Softshells** have emerged from their old shells and now have a soft shell. Softshells are eagerly awaited by crabbers each season. Softshell season is marked by the first full moon. Softshell season continues through early fall. Softshells live on the water often kept in live wells so they can harden their shell crabs as soon as they are caught. Soft shells must be 3 1/2" to keep/eat them.
- **Sheds** are shells left behind after a crab has discarded them, so they are not eaten. Softshells are called "sheds" when they are discarded.
- **Papershell** crabs are crabs whose shells have stiffened.
- **Buckram** crabs are at the beginning of following papershell when they are starting to harden but is still soft.