

# Making Your Own Trap for Crawfish

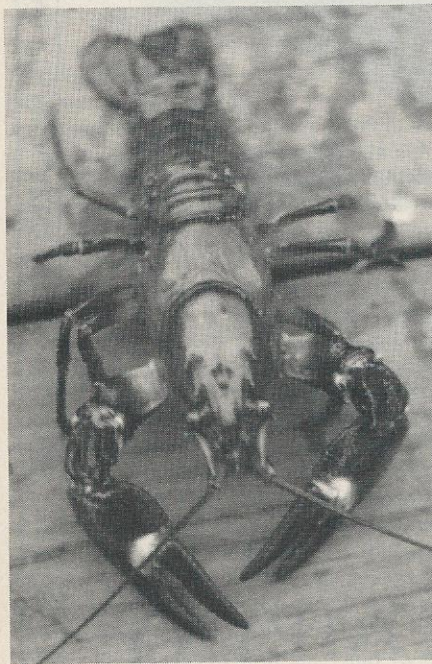
By Bruce Ransom

WHEN my family lived in southern Louisiana, the local crawfish feeds were a favorite summer event. People would line both sides of a long table, cracking, peeling and eating the boiled red crawfish piled high in front of them. These feeds originated with the Cajuns, but crawfish are also eaten extensively in Europe. Still, most Americans have never tried them.

Crawfish, crayfish or crawdads, whatever you call them, are found across most of the country, and frequently in good numbers. With surprisingly little time and effort you should be able to catch enough from your local waters to sample them yourself.

Crawfish are found in all but the Rocky Mountain states, and in all kinds of fresh-water, including rivers, lakes, sloughs, swamps even dark underground caverns in some regions. It may take a bit of prospecting to locate them, but once you get the hang of picking good crawfish water you'll have an ample supply.

Often growing to eight inches or longer (excluding antennas), one species reaches a foot in length. Crawfish are colored all shades of brown, red, orange, green and even blue. Water depths of five feet or less are preferred, but they will move deeper in the winter. In Lake Michigan one was captured 100 feet deep.



This seven-inch crawfish can provide excellent eating, and is easily caught in homemade traps.

The adults—the ones we're interested in—are most active from dusk to dawn, and some even come out onto shore. They scavenge both plant and animal matter, but don't actually prey on living animals. If alarmed they will dash backward by making brisk downward jerks with their tail.

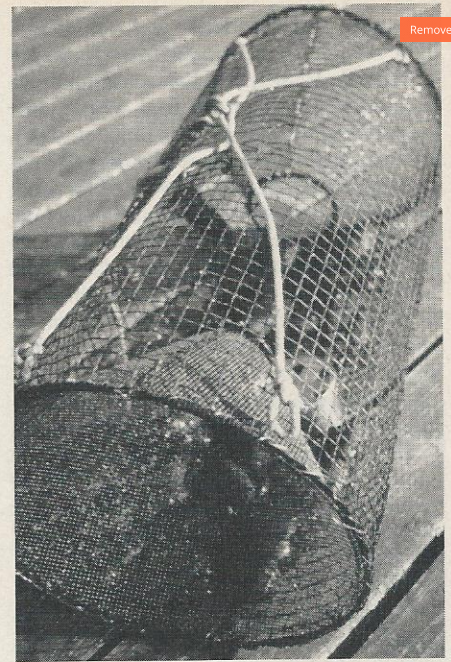
While seines, hoop nets, dip nets and baited lines are all used to catch crawfish, the simplest and easiest method is to use a baited box trap or cylindrical minnow pot. For bait, successful crawdad fishers swear by everything from fish heads and meat scraps to bread, liver and peanut butter. Any meat scraps should do—the fresher the better—but experiment a little in your own locale. My mother, who's making a killing off her dock, claims a can of cheap cat food works best. Just punch a few holes in the top and bottom and throw it in the trap.

Since crawfish are most active at night, this is the best time to fish. In the afternoon or evening, set your trap in the shallow area of a lake or river backwater. When you check it the next morning, several of the critters should be clinging to the sides. You'll quickly learn which sizes are too small for eating, and it's also a good idea to return females that are carrying eggs. Check under their tails; the eggs will be about one-eighth inch in diameter and in clumps. If you don't have any luck, try a different area. They shouldn't take long to find.

The more productive months are usually June through October in most regions, with late summer considered the best of all. You'll find the crawfish get larger as the season progresses. It's best to check with state fish and game personnel to see if your state regulates crawfish taking. Most states do not require a license but may have gear restrictions or a daily limit.

Crawfish traps are readily available commercially but it's cheap, easy and fun to make your own. The cylindrical minnow pot with inverted funnels is probably easier to build and less cumbersome to use than the box trap. About all you need is about five and one-quarter feet of two foot wide hardware cloth with one-half inch square mesh, a pair of pliers, some wire cutters and a little wire. Galvanized wire of about 20 gauge is best.

Begin by cutting out one of the funnel pieces as shown, but in paper first. This pattern should be a semicircle 12 inches in diameter, with an extra one-half inch on its straight, eight inch edges. Bring together the two straight edges, overlapping them one-half inch and paper clipping them together. The small hole should be



A punctured can of cat food was used to catch these crawfish in an overnight trap.

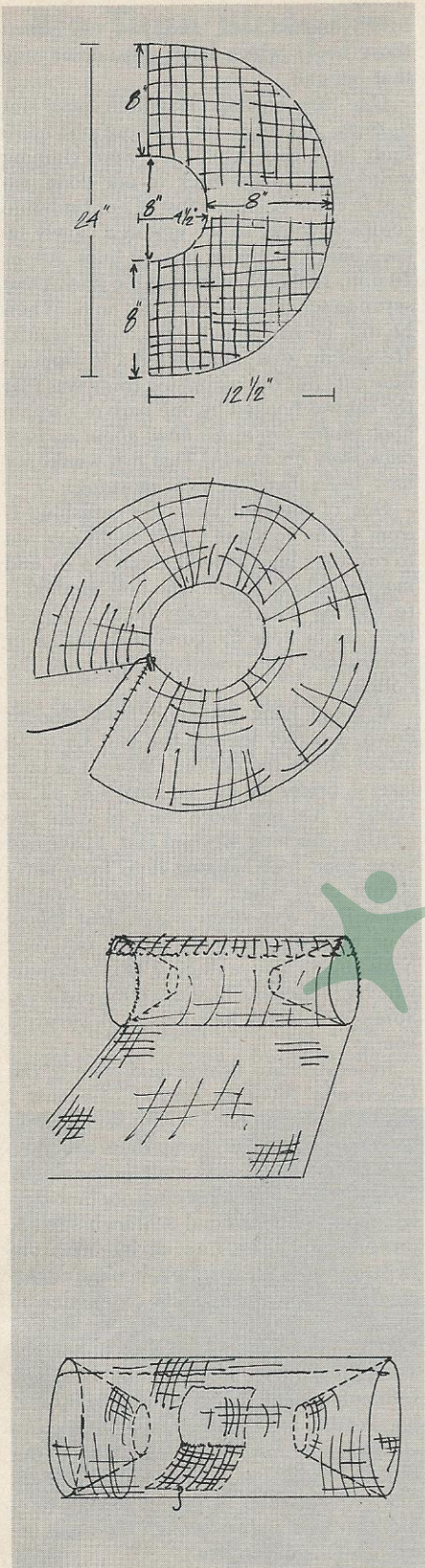
four inches in diameter and the large hole 12 inches. Once you get the shape right, use this pattern to cut two pieces out of hardware cloth. Wire each funnel's eight inch edges together. The finished funnels are then rolled onto the outer factory edges of the two foot wide hardware cloth, wiring them to the big ends of the funnels as you go. After the hardware cloth has been rolled completely around the funnels, overlap the edges one-half inch, cut off any excess and wire the seam together.

All that remains is to cut an access hole of about four by six inches to enable you to retrieve your catch. It will be covered with a slightly larger piece of scrap hardware cloth and hinged with wire along the lower edge. A short piece of shock cord with wire hooks on either end will hold this cover closed. Attach 10 feet of nylon line and the trap is ready to use.

To make the funnels easier to form, you can use a smaller mesh hardware cloth, and if one-eighth inch wire is made into loops and attached to both ends of the funnels, it will add strength and durability to the trap.

I figure it took me about an hour to build my trap, and at \$1.50 per foot I spent \$8 on hardware cloth. By shopping around a little or building traps with a friend or two, both figures could be easily bettered.

Crawfish are easily kept in aquariums for up to a year, providing much entertainment and education for children and adults alike. They like a gravel bottom with some large flat stones, and will probably need some aeration from a small aquarium pump. Their water will become dirty fairly rapidly, so a small filter will be helpful, too. Don't heat the water, but do cover the aquarium. You should have about five gallons of water per crawfish; if



To build a crawfish trap, start with five and one-half feet of two-foot wide hardware cloth. Cut two pieces in a semicircle and wire them together. The finished funnels should have one hole four inches in diameter and the other 12 inches. Then roll the finished funnels onto the outer edges of the hardware cloth, wiring them together as you go. Finally, cut an access hole and cover it with a scrap piece of wire cloth.

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you plan to keep more than one, choose them of equal size and they'll fight less.

Don't forget to feed the crawfish, but don't overfeed them, either. Fresh meat scraps or raw vegetable matter will do fine. In laboratories they've been kept alive on all kinds of meat, cottonseed meal, and even hay. Every couple of weeks or so change half the water, preferably with water from a clean lake or stream.

Should you be among the majority who would rather eat their catch, there are several proven methods of preparation. Most are simply boiled in seasoned water for 10-15 minutes, Cajun style. In some parts of the country there is a possibility of parasites, so be sure to boil them well. This done, clean them by twisting and pulling off the tail, cutting along the top side of it with some small scissors and pulling the tail meat out in one piece. As for the claws, break them off and crack them to get at their meat.

Probably the best way to enjoy the fresh meat the first time is to simply dip it in warm butter or a shrimp sauce and pop in into your mouth. We save tails and claws over time, freezing them until we have enough for crawfish bisque, stuffed crawdad shells, or my mother's crawfish etouffee, the recipe for which is included here.

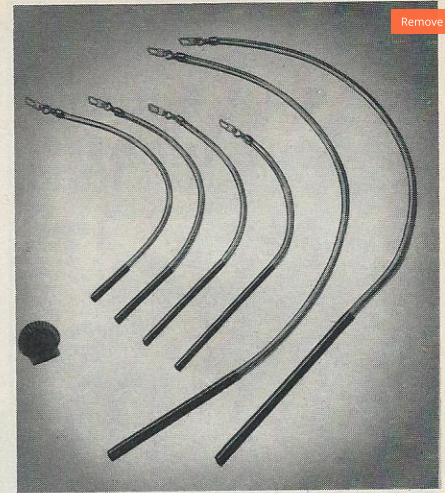
Whatever your desires, you should be able to find plenty of crawfish close by to experiment with.

#### Crawfish Etouffee An old Cajun dish pronounced "a-too-fay"

- 30 crawfish (use meat from tails and large claws)
- 3 green onions—chopped (use all of the green part also)
- 1/4 cup green pepper—chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley (1/2 teaspoon dried)
- 1/4 teaspoon paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 tablespoon corn starch
- 2 cups water
- 1/2 cube butter
- 1/4 cube butter

If crawfish are live, put in boiling water for 10-15 minutes. Separate tails and claws from bodies. Clean them like crab and shrimp. Use the meat from 20-40 crawfish depending on size.

Add paprika to 1/2 cube butter in frying pan. Mix well, then saute meat lightly. Remove from frying pan. Add 1/4 cup butter to frying pan and saute the green onions, pepper and parsley lightly. Leave in frying pan. Mix corn starch and water together slowly. Add this mixture to the pan; stir over medium heat until it thickens. Simmer five minutes. Add crawfish meat and simmer five more minutes. Add salt and pepper. Serve over cooked rice (1/2 cup uncooked rice for two). ■



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