

BOUNTIFUL WATERS

WRITTEN BY KERRY NEWBERRY PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN VALLS



The crew uses a "winch" to pull up the crab pots, which weigh anywhere from 60 to 125 lbs and measure 36" to 48" in diameter. The average boat fishes 300-500 pots in depths of 5-100 fathoms (30 to 600 feet) of water. To ensure future harvests, only mature male crabs measuring 6¼" across the shell are harvested; juvenile males and all females are returned to the sea.

A SILVERY FOG SHROUDS THE NEWPORT DOCKS, AND SWEEPS ACROSS THE TIPS OF TOWERING PINE TREES. WHEN A WIND BLOWS, THE MOORED FISHING BOATS SLOW DANCE IN THE BLUE-GREEN YAQUINA BAY. STOIC BOATS OF HANDCRAFTED SOLID WOOD MINGLE WITH SLEEK SHINY STEEL. DESTINY AND HEIDI SUE, SUMMER PLACE, SEEKER, BLUE FOX AND ORCA, THE NAMES TATTOOED ACROSS EACH VESSEL, LIKE TERMS OF ENDEARMENT.

It's just before 8am on a Saturday morning and from afar the docks appear sleepy. Zoom in and a Bruce Springsteen ballad blasts from the F/V Orca, where three fishermen clad in construction orange waders prep for a halibut trip. The ruddy-faced captain directs his crew, currently fueled by the rock-n-roll. Two boats away, seagulls swoop and squawk around a vessel returning from a successful Albacore tuna mission. A youthful fisher poses with a six-foot long silvery gray fish, nearing twenty pounds, still glistening from the sea. In Newport, from dawn to dusk, the bustling historic Bayfront, a working waterfront, is where all the action is.

Newport's nautical heritage hails back to 1882 when the Bayfront was the economic backbone of the city, housing both a port for commercial fishing and the timber industry. Today, the Bayfront is one of two of the largest ports in Oregon and home to Oregon's largest commercial fishing fleet. The Port of Newport also ranks in the top fifteen for fishery landings in the nation. The fleet fishes year round for whatever is in season, ranging from halibut and herring to albacore, sablefish, salmon, sardines and shrimp. The most lucrative catch however, in terms of value, is Dungeness Crab, and Newport holds the crown for the "Dungeness Crab Capital of the World." The race for Dungeness crabs, the most valuable catch on the West Coast, kicks-off the first of December. When the days are short, dark and rainy. Out at sea, the wind and water is unpredictable and unruly. The working conditions demand a hardy spirit and a sense of adventure.



LEFT Patience is a virtue, in life and in fishing. RIGHT Newport's fishing fleet, the largest in Oregon, also houses one of the last wooden boat fleets. MIDDLE Laura Anderson of Local Ocean buys direct from the local fishermen for her Bayfront seafood market and grill, and works with more than 50 local fishermen. The Dungeness crab fishery continues to make the "green light" category in guides such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium Sea Watch for sustainability initiatives. BELOW Illustrious crab pots dot the seascape in season, each vessel has a distinctly colored buoy.



“The Dungeness Fishery is the most dangerous in the world,” says Cory Feldner, one of the crab fishermen based out of Newport, a fisher that relishes the thrill of the chase. Feldner is blond and baby-faced with a winsome smile. He moved from North Dakota to fish with his uncle one summer, fell for the autonomous life at sea, and never left. Twenty-five years later, he’s now running the boat, after his uncle, Jeff Feldner, also a long-time commercial fisherman, stepped into a research position with Oregon Sea Grant. Like many of the boats in Newport, the F/V Granville is a family affair. The seventy-year old, 45-foot vessel is crafted of solid wood, an increasing rarity among fishing boats today. Newport is home to one of the last working wooden boat fleets, works of art from a bygone era.

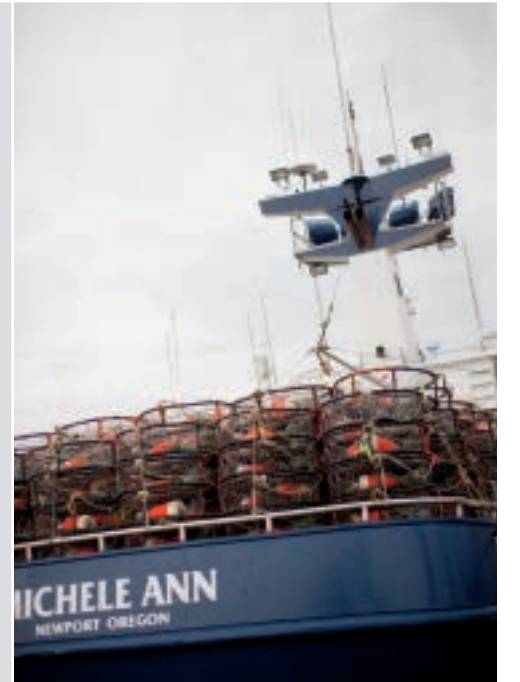
“They like to call it the deadliest catch up in Alaska,” Feldner continues, “but it’s really not, it’s more dangerous here.” Every year, an average of one or two fishermen lose their lives at sea. In addition to the winter weather, the risk is when boats are crossing the Yaquina Bay bar—the shallowest area before heading out to sea. “You don’t want Hawaii Five-O’s coming on your boat,” says Feldner. “Water is powerful, it can bend steel and turn wood into toothpicks.” Dungeness Crab starts as a derby fishery, come the first of December, the race is on. “You get them while you can, as fast as you can,” says Jeff Feldner, “It’s very important to be out there the first day.” Which means even if the weather turns, once the big boats head out, small boats will follow, because the pressure is on. There are only so many crabs, and the majority of the commodity crustaceans are caught in the first two weeks of the season. “Production drops about a third every time you run,” says Jeff. “In a bad year you might get half your year out of the first pick and the numbers go down every time you head out,” he adds.

The first week of crabbing, the boats often run back-to-back trips, returning only to unload and maybe sleep for a few hours. Feldner and his two-man crew on the F/V Granville work with 300 pots and land around 150,000-200,000 pounds of crab a year. His boat holds about 8,000 pounds of crab when it’s full. In comparison, the big boats that race pots until they are full can hold 50-60,000 pounds of crabs each trip. During peak crabbing season, Feldner and his crew are on the water by 5am, depending on the tides, and return by 11pm each night. Each boat has a different brightly colored buoy that marks their crab pots and different lengths of line depending on where they drop them ranging from 30 to 600 feet deep. As Feldner drives the boat, his two-man crew uses a winch to haul each 100-pound crab pot up through the water.

Once on deck, the crew sorts the male and female crabs, re-baits the pot and tosses it overboard before the boat coasts up to the next buoy, which is about a football field away. “Just like connect the dots,” says Feldner. But at high-speed. Each pot takes two minutes tops and the process will be repeated up to 300 times in one day. Despite the derby-style competition in commercial crabbing, comradery still perseveres. Although a fisherman does not readily divulge where their crab pots are, we all pretty much know where other keeps their crab pots, says Feldner. “Whoever finds the fish, the other guys go there,” says Feldner. If you are getting a good catch, the secret won’t last long. “That’s why you work in groups.” Most of the boats fish in packs, especially if they are fishing halibut or salmon solo. “If three or four guys head out alone on boats, they know where each other is and they pay attention to each other, so you are never really alone.”



LEFT Laura Anderson of Local Ocean showcases the daily catch. Purists will want to order the two pound whole cooked crab in the shell. On blustery days, warm up with the soul-satisfying Roasted Garlic and Dungeness Crab Soup. ABOVE A favorite for locals and visitors alike, Local Ocean is the spot to eat on the Oregon Coast. On sunny days, floor-to-ceiling windows with roll-up glass doors spotlight the nearby fishing boats in the harbor and Yaquina Bay. BELOW For many fishermen, time at sea is a gift. OPPOSITE At Local Ocean, the daily catch is labeled with the vessel, the name of the fisherman and how it was harvested.





Crabbing in Newport is nothing short of fantastic. Both Dungeness and Red rock crabs call the waters of the estuaries and bays home and big boats experience excellent crabbing on the off shore waters of the Pacific Ocean.

Many charter operators offer crabbing trips and provide facilities for cooking the crabs back at the docks for an additional fee. Crabbing and clamming are excellent in Yaquina Bay. Crab pots and other equipment can be rented at local tackle shops.

NEWPORT CHARTER OPERATORS

Yaquina Bay Charters

Fishing and whale watching charters.
1000 SE Bay Blvd., Newport, OR 97365
1.866.465.6801

Newport Marina Store & Charters

Charters, boat rentals, bait, tackle and gifts
541.867.4470

Captain's Reel Deep Sea Fishing

Fishing and whale-watching charters.
343 SW Bay Blvd., Newport, OR 97365
1.800.865.7441

Newport Tradewind Charters

Fishing and whale-watching charters.
1.800.676.7819

A fishing license is required for shellfish, including crabs and clams. Dungeness crabs, which are native in the local waters, are available year-round in Yaquina Bay, although ocean crabbing season is closed Aug. 15 - Nov. 30 to allow crabs to molt.

Fishing seasons and limits are subject to change so, before heading out, it's best to check the current Oregon sport fishing regulations, available where you buy your fishing license, to visit the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Web site at www.dfw.state.or.us, or call the department's 24-hour information line 1.800.720.6339.

The fisherman, in literature and lore, is often a romanticized character—an old salt with a cowboy spirit and a sea-soaked soul. In reality, commercial fishing is a hard life and a serious business, one that is in constant change as fisheries battle depleting resources, politics and the shifting economy.

"I always think it means something," adds Feldman, when asked why he fishes. "It's feeding people." Captain Bob, as he is affectionately called around the docks, mans the 51-foot F/V My Less, a boat built in 1975 during the war efforts. For him, fishing is a lifestyle, not just a business. "I try to put as many days at sea as I can," he says.

Andy makes every trip with me, he adds, gesturing across the boat. Andy is a fluffy white Shih Tzu nestled near a pile of rope. Yes, an uncommon boat dog. "He looks like a snazzy dog until he gets a little bit of fish on him," says Kemp. The ocean captivated Kemp at an early age. "I was five years old when my father built a small skiff and from there we would go out on a port and fish," he says. At that point he was forever smitten with the sea. "My work is my play," he says. You know that tune, he asks? In a sort of spoken word he repeats the lyrics by musician Bob Franke: "What can you do with your days but work & hope. Let your dreams bind your work to your play." Kemp crabs with a 300 pot-permit for boat, which is considered a medium sized operation. He prefers crabbing a few weeks after the season starts. "The big boats leave after first few days of crabs and the smaller boats thrive," he says. Volume goes down, and the price goes up. "The Dungeness crab is cool fishery management wise because there is a big portion of it that takes care of itself," says Kemp.

A state-managed fishery, Oregon's Dungeness crab is regulated by size, sex and season, only males meeting a minimum size standard (at least 6¼ inches across the back shell) are harvested. Smaller males and all females are returned to the water to ensure healthy stocks for the future. "That's the beauty of not over-harvesting," says Kemp. Oregon's strict targeted harvesting results in little or no "by-catch" mortality, another reason the fishery continues to make the "green light" category in guides such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium Sea Watch.

In 2010, the Oregon Dungeness Crab fishery earned Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification, one of only three crab fisheries in the world to receive MSC certification, and the only one of five West Coast Dungeness fisheries with the sustainability certification. MSC is a global, independent organization that has developed the world's leading environmental standard for certifying sustainable and well-managed wild-capture fisheries.

"MSC is educating the fish eating public and having them become more aware of why fish costs what it does when it comes from here," says Kemp. As a fisherman that likes to spin a yarn, Kemp is interested in developing direct market sales with the community. "I think it's very important that the public get a chance to talk to fishermen," he says. One of the main reasons visitors head to Newport is to see a working waterfront. "If the public sees who I am and how I fish, I believe that leads to education," says Kemp. "My passion is to put an identity, a face on who caught what."

CRAB CAKES

2 ounces shelled and deveined shrimp
2 ounces fresh scallops
¼ cup heavy cream
½ pound cooked, shelled Dungeness crabmeat
½ cup fresh flat-leaf Parsley, finely chopped,
plus more leaves for garnish
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

LEMON AIOLI

2 egg yolks
Juice of ½ lemon
1 garlic clove minced
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

GREEN OIL

½ cup spinach
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

BALSAMIC SYRUP

1 cup balsamic vinegar

1. Make the crab cakes: Blend the shrimp, scallops, cream and lemon juice in the bowl of a food processor until smooth. Transfer the mixture to a medium bowl and gently fold in the crabmeat and parsley with a wooden spatula. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate until ready to use.

2. Make the aioli: Whisk the egg yolks in a small bowl until well combined. Add the olive oiled in a slow stream, whisking steadily until well combined. If the mixture is too thick, substitute a few teaspoons of water for the remaining oil, as the aioli comes together. Salt and pepper to taste. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate until ready to use.

3. Make the green oil: Blend the spinach and olive oil in the bowl of a food processor until bright green and well combined. Set aside.

4. While the vinegar reduces, remove the crab mixture from the refrigerator and form it into four ½-inch thick patties. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Cook the crab cakes until golden brown, about 4 minutes per side.

5. Make the aioli: Decorate the plate with drops of green oi and balsamic syrup. Place the crab cakes in the center of the plate and garnish with spoonful of aioli and chopped parsley. Repeat with the remaining crab cakes and serve immediately.

Dungeness Crab Cakes

Recipe from chef Mark Newman of Newman's at 988 in Cannon Beach
Find this and other recipes in *Dishing up Oregon*, by Ashley Gartland

