

# The Boston Globe

Michael Floreak | August 17, 2021

## Green crabs are invasive. Lucky for us, they are also delicious



Nico Lewenberg, 4, examines the shell of a green crab under a canopy made from crab netting along Fort Point Channel. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

When preparing to do battle with an invasive species, it's important to know your enemy. When that enemy is the highly destructive European green crab, it helps that your foe is delicious and the battle may well be fought on the plate.

At least that's the hope of Greencrab.org, an organization that promotes culinary uses as a way to increase harvest and mitigate destruction by a pest that is abundant in New England waters.

"Green crabs are one of the world's worst invasive species. They first came to New England about 200 years ago when Europeans brought them in the ballast water of their ships," says Mary Parks, founder and executive director of Greencrab.org.

Over the past centuries, green crab populations have ballooned in New England and Canada where they found "the perfect combination" of habitat, diet, and lack of predators. The crabs have hybridized to adapt to changing climate conditions, and reproduce impressively — a single crab can produce up to 185,000 eggs per year. They can also live for as long as a week out of the water.

The crabs wreak destruction on native habitats by eating clam, mussel, oyster, and scallop species, and outcompeting local crabs for food. When green crabs forage for food, they destroy vital seagrass habitat that is nursery

grounds for finfish and shellfish, and feeding grounds for birds and turtles. "They have a pretty wide range of habitat, from eel grass, salt marshes, tide pools, to out in deeper water," Parks says.

The green crabs most commonly found in New England are a subspecies called European green crabs, which are native to northern Europe. The crabs are considered a delicacy in their native locations — Venetians especially love softshell green crabs and their delicate roe. Chefs who cook with green crabs prize them for their sweet and rich flavor.

Beyond their native areas, European green crabs are unwelcome visitors who have invaded waters on every continent but Antarctica, and are especially plentiful in New England. "If you find a crab on a beach in new England, there's a pretty good chance it's a green crab," says Parks.

Many people who come across green crabs never realize it. Color is not the crabs' most identifying feature — they can be red, brown, black, blue, purples, or green. The crabs are better identified by looking at their heads. "If you see five points on either side of their eyes, that's a green crab," Parks says.

Greencrab.org is working to educate people on how to recognize green crabs — and giving them the chance to

sample to green crab dishes — at family-focused Green Crabs at the Beach popup events around Boston through the end of August.

At the beach events, co-sponsored by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and the Department of Conservation and Recreation, visitors are introduced to green crabs through a number of activities, including a touch tank where they can learn to identify the species. Kids can experience green crab-themed art by Boston-based public artist Carolyn Lewenberg, get a free green crab coloring book created by graphic designer Eileen Riestra, and adults can learn more about how to cook with green crabs.

Green Crabs at the Beach events are planned for Carson Beach on Friday, Aug. 19; Winthrop Beach on Aug. 22; and Wollaston Beach on Aug. 29.

The beach popups support Greencrab.org's goal of getting the word out about cooking with green crabs. According to Parks, there are many uses for the crabs — from softshell preparations to using their delicate meat in sauces to making broths. The organization's website includes a number of recipes for home cooks. But for now, green crabs' primary commercial use is not as food, but as bait, a market that is seasonal and low paying for harvesters.

Parks hopes that will change with growing culinary uses.

"Culinary markets could not only incentivize more removal [of green crabs] but provide a new sustainable seafood at a time when we are having so many fisheries that are collapsing. It's really a powerful thing. Hopefully by getting more people excited about eating them, we'll get more people excited about fishing them," Parks says.

Parks says the organization is working with chefs across New England to create green crab recipes, understand how they would work with green crabs in their kitchen, and learn how much they would be willing to spend on green crabs. The organization is also working to build a network of green crab harvesters and suppliers.

Another way that Greencrab.org hopes to whet the local appetite this summer is by partnering with area restaurants to feature special green crab dishes on their menus for the week of Aug. 21. Loyal Nine in Cambridge and Northern Spy in Canton have signed on, with more to come.

Parks acknowledges that even a robust culinary market wouldn't eradicate the invasive species, "However, we can absolutely mitigate the effects of their damage. And we can absolutely reduce their population."

For details visit [Greencrab.org](https://www.greencrab.org).



Keriana Queen, 16, pulls up a baited basket to check for crabs in Fort Point Channel. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF