

Lobster University

Lobsters grow by molting. Baby lobsters molt several times a year, mature ones only once.

Many people like these “Shedders” because they are easier to eat and their flavor is sweeter. You don’t even need implements to crack them. They tend to be less expensive than hard-shell lobsters. Some chefs prefer hard shell lobsters for their fuller meat content.

Most aficionados say that male and female lobsters taste the same. But only the females have the “coral,” or roe, the internal egg sac that turns a vivid coral color when cooked and enriches some recipes. If you use the coral, you’ll need to learn how to recognize the females.

Turn the lobster on its back and look at the swimmerets, the tiny flippers on its tail. The top pair of swimmerets are reproductive organs. If hard, they’re male. If soft and feathery, they’re female.

Although harvesters can’t keep lobsters showing fertilized eggs on their belly, many female lobsters contain internal unfertilized eggs. These tiny dark eggs are near the upper part of the tail. You can remove them from a raw lobster and stir them into a sauce, or add the chopped cooked roe to a mayonnaise or vinaigrette.

What’s the Yield?

The yield from a lobster can vary considerably with the season. In winter, when they’re fleshiest, you might get close to 25 percent yield. Soft-shell lobsters may yield much less and the price should reflect that. On average, you can expect about a 20 percent yield from a Maine lobster.

Soft Shell Yield- 17-19%

Approx. 5.25 lobsters per lb. of meat

Hard Shell Yield 20-25%

Approx. 4.2 lobsters per lb. of meat

Choose Your Size

Although some think smaller lobsters are sweeter and tenderer, lobster authorities say they don’t notice a difference until the lobster weighs around five pounds.

Selects usually cost more per pound because they are most in demand. If you aren’t serving the lobster whole, consider buying the cheaper culls.

Live lobsters should be feisty, not sluggish, and they should feel heavy for their size. When you lift them, their tail should curl and they should flail at you with their claws. If their claws are droopy, send them back.

Culls: lobsters missing a claw

Chickens: about one pound

Quarters: about 1 ¼ pounds

Selects: 1-1/2 to 2-1/2 pounds

Jumbos: over 2-1/2 pounds