



RECREATIONAL BLUE CRAB REGULATIONS

All information provided below is summarized from the Code of Virginia and VMRC Regulations. Please refer to the Code sections and Regulations cited for legal documentation. All regulations are subject to change.

Licensing Information

The following activities **do not require a license** in Virginia [[Code 28.2-226](#)]:

- Taking by dip net, hand line (e.g. “chicken necking”), or up to two commercial-style crab pots as much as one bushel of hard crabs and two dozen peeler crabs in any one day for personal use.
- Using one tank or float no greater than 4 feet in width and 8 feet in length for shedding crabs for personal use.

The use of the following gears **requires a license** for “recreational use of commercial gear”. Each of these licenses shall be issued to an individual for their exclusive use [[Code 28.2-226.2, 4VAC20-670-20](#)]:

- One crab trap or pound (\$6.00)
 - Note: The crab trap licensed in Virginia is a fixed gear similar to a pound net. This gear must be approved by Marine Law Enforcement. Only one crab trap license may be purchased per individual.
- Crab trotline up to 300 feet (\$10.00)
- 3 to 5 recreational crab pots with (\$36.00) or without (\$46.00) terrapin excluder device
 - Only one of either license may be purchased per individual.
- Cast net (\$10.00) or covered by Saltwater Recreational Fishing License

Buying a License

- The licenses listed above can be purchased at the following locations:
 - MRC Licensing Agents ([Locate Agent](#))
 - DGIF agents ([Locate Agent](#))
 - Mail-in purchase can be arranged by calling (757) 247-2265
 - Crab pound/trap licenses can only be bought from Operations & MPO field offices ([Map](#))

To use a rod-and-reel requires a Saltwater Recreational Fishing License, unless exempted. Saltwater Recreational Fishing Licenses may only be purchased from DGIF. (Purchase license [HERE](#) or see more license info [HERE](#))

Seasons

Up to 2 crab pots	March 17 – November 30
Licensed 3-5 crab pots	June 1 – September 15
Crab trotline or pound/trap	April 1 – October 31
Hand line, collapsible recreational traps, cast net	All year

It is unlawful for any person to place, set, or fish or knowingly leave any hard crab pot or peeler pot in any Virginia tidal waters from December 1 through March 16.

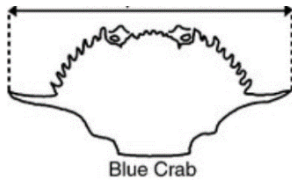
Possession Limits

All recreational crabbing is limited to 1 bushel of hard crabs and 2 dozen peeler crabs per person or per vessel per day. When fishing from a vessel, the vessel limit is 1 bushel and 2 dozen peelers regardless of how many people are on board. When crabbing from land, the limits apply to each individual. [[Code 28.2-226](#), [4VAC20-670-25](#)]

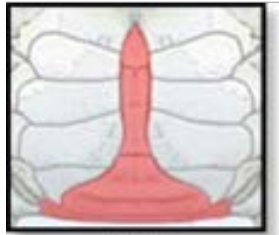
The “bushel” is a volumetric measurement, roughly equal to 40 pounds.

Size Limits

(As measured from tip-to-tip of the longest spikes)



Hard Crabs	Male	5 inches	Code 28.2-708
	Immature female	5 inches	
	Mature female	No size limit	
Peeler Crabs	March 17-July 15	3 ¼ inches	4VAC20-270-55
	July 16-November 30	3 ½ inches	
	Seaside Eastern Shore	3 ¼ inches	
Softshell Crabs		3 ½ inches	



Male
"Jimmy"



Immature Female
"Sally" or "She-Crab"

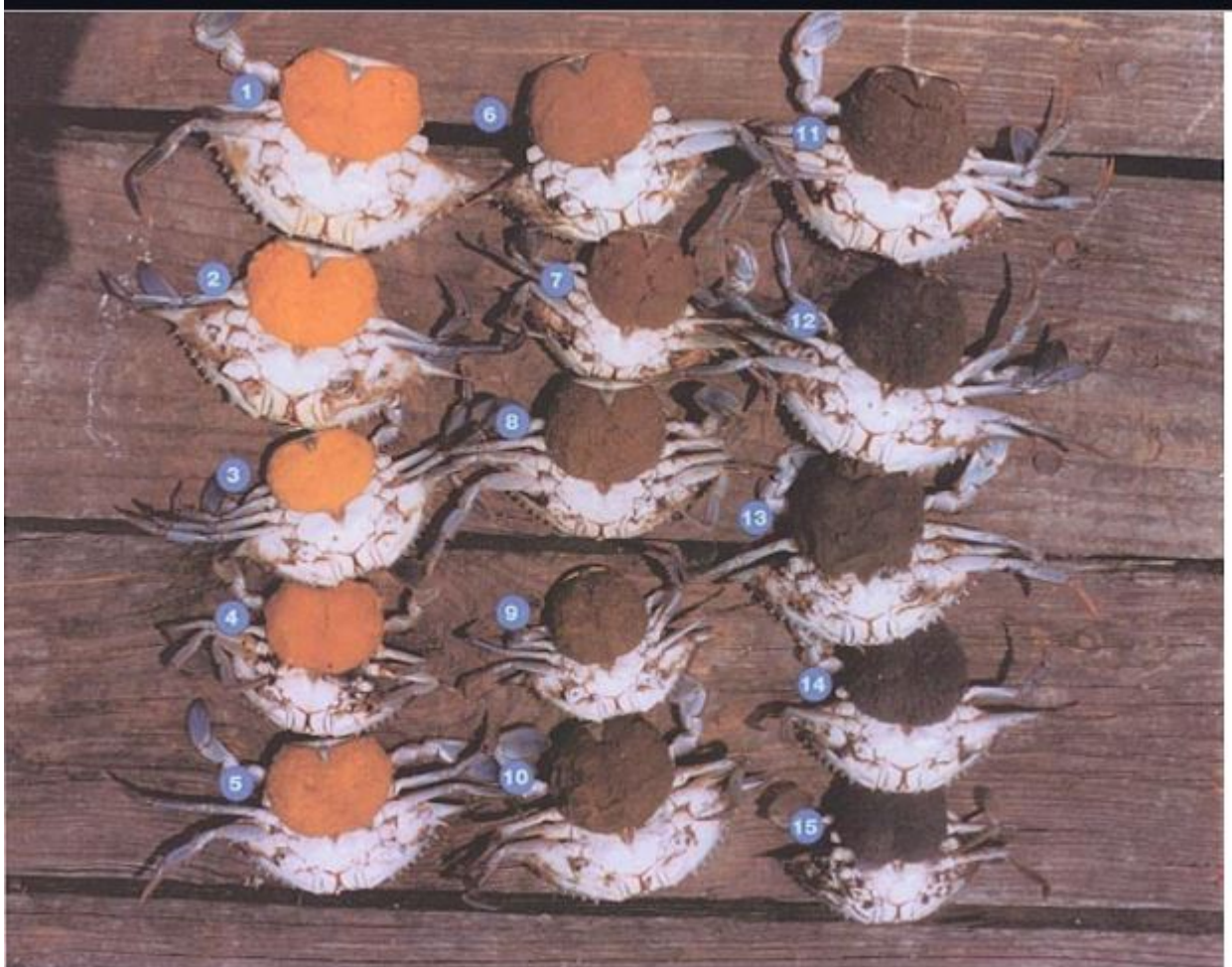


Mature Female
"Sook"

Male "Jimmy": Washington Monument

Female "Sook": US Capitol

Sponge Crabs



From March 17 through June 15, you can only keep bright orange sponge crabs (1-5 above). All brown to black sponge crabs must be returned to the water (6-15 above).

From June 16 through March 16, you can keep any sponge crabs [[4VAC20-370-20](#)].

Why? Bright orange crabs are less likely to survive if thrown back. The darker crabs will release their eggs sooner than the lighter crabs (the color darkens as the eggs develop), so they're hardier. Many people choose to return all sponge crabs to the water as a conservation measure.

Gear Marking

Buoys of any crab pot or crab trotline, and an offshore stake of any crab pound/trap, used for recreational purposes, shall be marked legibly with the last 4 numbers of the licensee's social security number or driver's license number, preceded with the letter "R"; these figures must be at least 1 inch in height. [[4VAC20-670-40](#)].

Other Crabbing and Crab Gear Regulations

It is illegal to:

- Use more than 5 crab pots per licensee recreationally [[4VAC20-670-30](#)].
- Fish 3-5 pots with the 5 pot license on Sundays [[4VAC20-670-30](#)]
- Crab recreationally within Virginia Blue Crab Sanctuary Area 1A from June 1 through September 15, in Sanctuary Area 1B from May 16 through September 15, and in Sanctuary Area 3 from May 9 through September 15. For GPS coordinates of the sanctuaries, see [4VAC20-752](#). {[MAP](#)}.

A recreational crab pot must have at least two unobstructed cull rings at least 2 3/8 inches inside diameter cull rings located one each in opposite exterior side panels of the upper chamber of the pot [[4VAC20-700-20](#)].

On the seaside of Accomack & Northampton Counties, each pot must have two cull rings: one cull ring at least 2 5/16 inches inside diameter and another at least 2 3/16 inches inside diameter located one each in opposite exterior side panels of the upper chamber of the pot [[4VAC20-700-20](#)].

Each crab pound/trap must have at least four unobstructed cull rings of at least 1 1/2 inch inside diameter, located two each under water in the lower portion of two opposite side panels (perpendicular to the shoreline) of the retention box [[4VAC20-460-50](#)].

Any law or regulation applying to the setting or fishing of crab pound/traps or crab trot lines shall also apply when those gears are set or fished for recreational purposes [[4VAC20-670-30](#)].

Recreational Reporting

Any person catching finfish or shellfish using a licensed recreational gillnet, cast net, dip net, 5 crab pots, crab trap, crab trotline, or eel pot must report harvest annually to the Commission

[[4VAC20-670-10](#)]. You can report online through the [Virginia Saltwater Journal](#) or by mailing in paper forms found [here](#).

For more information on Recreational Use of Commercial Gear, see [4VAC20-670-10](#).

For more information on crab traps and pounds, see [4VAC20-460-10](#).

For more information on the blue crab fishery, see [4VAC20-270-55](#).

Crabbing in Maryland and the Potomac River

Maryland recreational regulations: <https://dnr.maryland.gov/fisheries/Pages/regulations/blue-crab.aspx>

Potomac River recreational regulations (includes map of jurisdictions on and around the Potomac River): http://prfc.us/fishing_potomac.html

Definitions

Jimmy: A male hard crab with a narrow apron on the abdomen.

Sook: A mature female hard crab with a semicircular apron.

Sponge crab: An adult female hard crab which has extruded her eggs on the abdomen or abdominal flap. The egg mass or "Sponge" may contain about 2 million eggs.

Peeler crab: Any crab with a soft shell fully developed under the hard shell. A white, pink, or red line on the outer section of the "backfin" is an indicator.

Softshell crab: A crab which has recently emerged from its old shell. The new shell is soft and tender.

Last Updated: 4/10/2020