Basic Crabbing Rig

Materials:
- trap
- float
- bait cage
- bait
- 100 ft. rope (sinking)
- water (salt)

Tips for Crabbing:
- fresh bait, meat, or fish
- look for a sandy, muddy bottom
- 20-80 ft. deep off a fresh water stream

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Crabbing 101

Equipment:
A Crab Trap
Approximately 100 ft sinking line or floating line plus a weight.
A float with your name and phone number on it. (No improvised float like a bleach bottle)
Bait container and bait.
Crab measuring device.
Tidal fishing license.

Any crab trap will work. Some people prefer a round trap as the theory is when crabs come to the corner of a square trap they fail to negotiate the corner and keep going in a straight direction. Personally all my traps are square and I catch lots.

Fix your bait holder in the bottom middle of your trap. Hard bait holders work better than soft mesh ones. Once the crabs eat all the bait they will attempt to get out. So a hard bait holder makes it more difficult for them to empty it.

What to use as bait depends on where you are crabbing. Fresh fish is the best. Particularly salmon or herring. Prawn heads are maybe even better than fish. I keep salmon and prawn heads in my spare freezer. If you don't have your own supply, we sell frozen herring that work very well. Alternatively you can use chicken backs, or necks. Chicken works, in fact any fresh meat works. In fact, in Nanaimo Harbour most people use chicken as we have a resident seal that knows all about fish heads in crab traps.
Crabbing 101

Whatever you use, make sure it is fresh. Old meat, commercial pellets, or cat food will work, but will attract undersized, and female crabs that can't compete with the big males for premium food.

When choosing a location to drop the trap I look for a shallow sand/mud bay, preferably with a fresh water source flowing in. If there is a creek or stream try dropping the trap in 30-60 ft in front of the stream. Let the trap soak for 30 min to 2hr before you check it. After a couple hours the bait tends to get eaten by crabs, fish or other creatures and the crabs start to try to find a way out.

Good Luck, Steve Vavrik
Prawning 101

**Equipment:**
A Prawn trap or two. You can put two on one prawn line. Put enough weight in each trap to keep them from drifting or bouncing with the waves.

Some form of sinking rope. Either lead line, float line with a lead clip weight, or best of all a 100 ft. of lead line spliced to a longer float line. Length of line is determined by the location you will be prawning in. 450-500 ft. is standard for most parts of the coast.

A big Scotchman float with your name and number written on it.

**Bait Holders.** Make sure you attach the bait holder to the middle of trap. If it drifts to the edge of trap the prawns will eat through the mesh of the trap and not find the tunnel into the trap.

Prawn bait. Either prawn pellets, Carlyle cat food or a mix of the two. Don’t forget to soak pellets overnight in herring oil or commercial prawn attractant. Don’t fill the bait holder more than 2/3s full, as the pellets will swell and you want some water flow through the bait holder to spread the scent out.

**Prawn line clips** to attach the traps to the rope.

**Technique:**
Attach the traps 30-50 ft. apart on the line using the prawn line clips. Make sure to tie a knot or loop at the end of the line so if the traps hang up they can’t slide off the end of the rope.

Now you have to choose a spot to drop them. Your best option is to get directions from successful prawners, or identify locations by noting where you see other peoples Scotchmen.
Prawning 101

If you have to choose your own spot take some time to examine your chart. Depth varies from region to region. Around Nanaimo most prawning takes place in 350-400 ft. of water. Around Ladysmith and Chemainus the water is generally shallower than most other regions so prawning is done in only 200-250 ft.

Make sure to have at least 100 ft. more line than the depth of the water you are in. Don’t be like the women that dropped her 100 ft. crab line in 100 ft. of water...at low tide. Then came back to the store and blamed me for the tide coming in.

Look for a flat mud or sand bottom at the edge of a drop off. Try to land your traps at the lip of the drop-off. Be careful that they are on the bottom, and not over the drop off. Use a large Scotchman to float the entire rig in case you do drop it in too deep of water.

I like my traps to sit upright on the bottom, so I don’t just toss them overboard and let them drift to the bottom. I lower them down in a controlled way.

Once I have set my traps, I watch them for a little while to make sure the current isn’t going to drag them away. I also keep them insight while fishing. Twice I’ve had to quickly pull mine when log booms where going to run it down. While some traps do get stolen, I think the majority of lost traps are due to high currents, and getting run over. Also dropping them in the ferries lanes is a good way to lose them.

Once they have soaked for a few hours it’s time to haul them in. While an electric hauler is preferred, most people start out pulling by hand. Personally I never minded pulling mine by hand, until I tried using a line hauler. Now pulling by hand seems too much like work.
However you do it, make sure to pull consistently without stopping. While pulling the prawns are pinned to the bottom of the trap, when you stop they can swim back and forth and some may get out.

It can take many attempts to dial in a good location. Sometimes it can take years, but a good spot can produce hundreds per trap. Once you find a productive spot, mark it on your chart plotter. Remember to not go over your limit. Count each prawn as you clean them, and please release the berried (ones with eggs) ones. I take the heads off (the heads are great crab bait) on the water, and freeze them shell on in tap water filled tupperware. Frozen in a block of ice like this they will last many months in the freezer. I find they last longer than vacuum packed salmon, with little to no degradation in quality. And remember if you catch too many, you can always drop off the excess here at the Chandler. Ask for Steve V from the tackle department.

Good luck,
Steve Vavrik