

Riddles, Trivia and More

Lobstermen have a language all their own. Stump your students with lobster riddles, with vocabulary words drawn from the trade books, such as,

What do you call a *female lobster*?A hen.

When is a lobster a *chicken*?When it weighs about one pound.

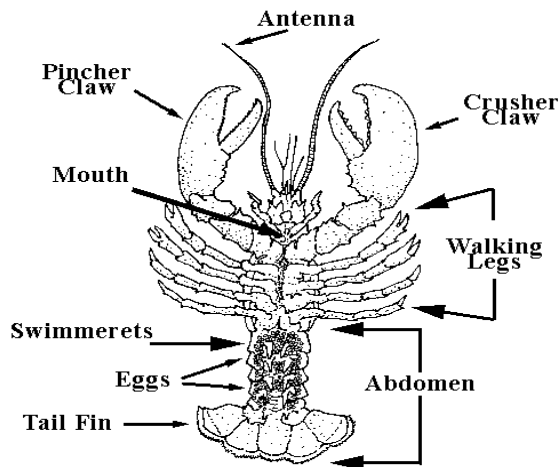
When is a lobster a *pistol*?When it has no claws.

Why wouldn't a lobsterman with *shorts* on want to meet a marine patrol officer?He has lobsters that don't meet the the legal size.

Why shouldn't a lobster walk into the *kitchen*?It's the first chamber of a lobster trap. (The inner chamber is called the bedroom or parlor.)

How can you tell a male from a female?

The swimmerets, the small feathery appendages on the underside of the tail, will provide the answer. The first pair of swimmerets closest to the body are hard and bony on a male, and soft and feathery like the rest of the swimmerets, on a female. Only the female has a small rectangular shield between her second pair of walking legs. This is the sperm receptacle where she stores the sperm after mating until she lays her eggs.



Lobster: Bottom View

A female also has a wider tail than a comparably-sized male. She needs the breadth for carrying all those eggs.

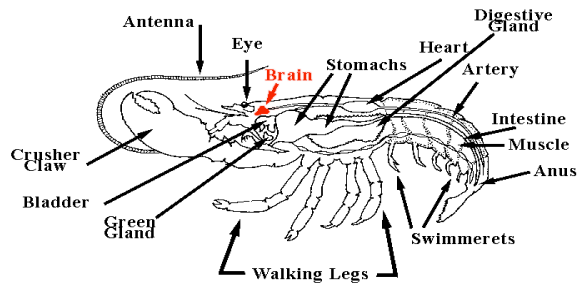
How big is a lobster's brain?

Dave Dow, former Director of the Lobster Institute, claims a lobster has a brain the size of a grasshopper's. The lobster brain is primarily just a collection of ganglia, or nerve

endings.

It's evident from the lobster brain's lack of complexity that a lobster does not do much deep thinking, adding support to lobstermen's claims that lobsters probably do not feel pain, certainly not in the way humans do.

Diagrams furnished courtesy
Maine/New Hampshire Sea Grant
Program. Used with permission.



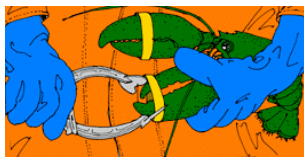
Lobster: Side View

How do you hypnotize a lobster?

To hypnotize a lobster, stand it on its head with its claws laid out in front of it and its tail curled inward. Rub your hand up and down the carapace making sure to rub between the eyes. Eventually it may stand by itself. (Whoever thought of this must have been really starved for excitement.)

Why are lobsters banded?

Crowded into tight quarters, lobsters become especially cannibalistic, which is why they must be banded in a lobster pound or store displays.



Lobster bands are small and strong. Lobster harvesters use a special tool that resembles a pair of pliers to open the rubber band to slip it over the lobster's claw

Why don't lobstermen use wooden pegs anymore?

Years ago, lobstermen used wooden or plastic pegs inserted into the base of the claws to prevent lobsters from opening them. When they did so, they broke the protective skin or integument of the lobster. Disease-causing bacteria could attack the lobster through this lesion.

Why do lobstermen release a *berried* female?

Because berries are eggs and females with eggs are released so the eggs can hatch. The eggs spend at least ten months on the female. The colder the water, the longer the eggs

take to hatch. A berried female is also marked with a V-notch in her tail so if she is caught again the lobsterman knows she was an egg-bearing female and releases her.

What are some of the more unusual types of bait tried?

After WW II, the LobLure Corporation tried to find a fool-proof type of artificial bait. Some of their unusual concoctions ranged from a bait bag that blinked like an electric light to less-promising kerosene-soaked bricks or white coffee mugs.

Why aren't more lobsters raised through aquaculture?

Many sea creatures, including salmon, oysters, and mussels, are raised successfully through sea farming or aquaculture. Since lobsters command such a high price at the market, you would think there would be massive aquaculture operations to raise them. Lobsters are not easy to raise in captivity, and as yet no one has made a profit from it. Experiments have been conducted for years trying to find an economic way to raise them without much success.

Two problems repeatedly crop up:

1. Lobsters in close quarters will eat each other. When lobsters are raised in captivity, they are kept in large vats as larvae. Whirlpool currents keep the baby lobsters spinning beyond each other's reach. When they settle to the bottom, they must be kept in individual pens and moved to ever larger enclosures as they grow.
2. Lobsters grow very slowly, taking an average of 5-7 years to reach market size. That's a long time to feed and maintain them. They can grow faster in warmer water, but it still takes several years to reach market size. Factor in food costs (lobsters can be picky eaters in captivity), heating the water to make them grow faster, and treating disease, and it's easy to see why raising a lobster to adulthood is expensive.

Another approach to lobster aquaculture has been to keep them captive only from egg to hatching to the fourth or fifth stages when they start to settle to the bottom. Hatchery operators then free the baby lobsters into the ocean and hope that they survive long enough to join the lobster fishery as market-size catch. A portion of the income from the sale of lobster licenses in Maine goes to fund a "seed lobster program" to support research in aquaculture or "sea farming." Perhaps 100,000 larval lobsters are released into coastal waters each year.