



For those who can lay their hands on wild crayfish, here is a freshwater alternative to that seafood classic, the prawn cocktail. For those who can't, the very home-made version of the cocktail sauce also makes an excellent dressing for cold prawns, crab and lobster.

Crayfish Cocktail

Ingredients:

at least 20 live crayfish (unless they are very large, you will need at least 7–8 per person)
lettuce leaves, to serve
lemon slices

Cocktail sauce:

500g Sungold or cherry tomatoes, cut in half
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
150ml mayonnaise, preferably home-made
lemon juice
cayenne pepper or dried chilli flakes

Method:

Put the crayfish in the freezer for about an hour, until completely torpid but not frozen solid. Then transfer them to a very large pan of rapidly boiling salted water (The Shellfish Network recommends this as the most humane way to kill them). When the water returns to the boil, boil the crayfish for 5 minutes. Drain and leave to cool.

To make the cocktail sauce, put the tomato halves in an ovenproof dish, sprinkle over the olive oil and garlic and roast in a fairly moderate oven (170°C/Gas Mark 3) for 45 minutes. Leave to cool, then rub through a sieve to make a rich, pulpy sauce. Add the tomato sauce to the mayonnaise a tablespoon at a time until you get a taste and consistency you like (2 1/2 tablespoons about does it for me). Sharpen with a little lemon juice and pep up with a pinch of cayenne pepper or chilli flakes. Chill until ready to serve.

Peel the cold crayfish, carefully extracting the meat from the tail and the larger claws. Reserve 6 or 8 whole heads with claws attached and set aside. Mix the flesh with enough of the sauce to coat it generously. (The rest of the sauce will keep for a week in the fridge and can be used with other seafood – try mixing it with tinned tuna for a sandwich filling!)

Serve the dressed crayfish on a bed of lettuce, garnished with 2 whole crayfish heads and 2 lemon slices on each plate. Finish with another pinch of cayenne or dried chilli over the dressed meat.

Acknowledgements: <http://www.rivercottage.net>