

Crab Cakes

Crab cakes are not native to New Orleans, but you would never know that to look at menus or recent local cookbooks. They moved in from Maryland in the early 1990s, replacing the good old stuffed crab, and igniting the issue that rages wherever crab cakes are found: Which restaurant makes the best? Interestingly, every single place that makes them at all claims its are self-evidently superior.

Most people will say that a great crab cake will contain as high a percentage of jumbo lump crabmeat as possible while still sticking together as a cake. But clearly there should be other things in there, too. I like green onions, parsley, a little garlic, and a little red bell pepper. I use béchamel to hold the crabmeat together, and a light dusting with bread crumbs so the things can be browned. Crab cakes should fall apart at the touch of a fork, not hold together like a hamburger.

- *1 stick butter*
- *1/2 cup all-purpose flour*
- *1 cup warm milk*
- *1/2 tsp. salt*
- *1/4 tsp. white pepper*
- *2 green onions, thinly sliced*
- *1 tsp. chopped fresh tarragon (or 1/2 tsp. dried)*
- *2 lbs. lump crabmeat*
- *1/3 finely-chopped red bell pepper*
- *1/2 cup plain bread crumbs*
- *2 tsp. Creole seasoning*
- *2 oz. clarified butter*

White remoulade sauce:

- *1/4 cup mayonnaise*
- *2 Tbs. Creole mustard*
- *1 Tbs. lemon juice*
- *1 tsp. Worcestershire*
- *Dash Tabasco*
- *1/4 tsp. granulated garlic*

1. Heat the butter in a heavy saucepan over low heat. Add the salt, white pepper, and flour and make a blond roux. Whisk in the milk until the blend has the texture of runny mashed potatoes. Cool to room temperature. (You have just made a béchamel.)
2. Pick crabmeat of any shells, trying to keep the lumps as whole as possible. Combine it in a large bowl with bell pepper, green onion, and tarragon. Add three-fourths of a cup of the cooled béchamel. Mix everything well with your fingers, being careful not to break the crabmeat.
3. Season the bread crumbs with Creole seasoning, and spread them on a plate. Using an ice cream scoop, scoop up balls of the crabmeat mixture. Gently form them into cakes about three-fourths of an inch thick. Press them gently onto the bread crumbs on each side, and shake off the excess crumbs.
4. Heat the clarified butter in a skillet. Sauté crab cakes until golden brown on the outside and heated all the way through. (The way to test this is to push the tines of a kitchen fork into the center of the cake, then touch the fork to your lips. That will tell you whether the heat has penetrated all the way through.)
5. Mix all ingredients for the white remoulade and serve with the crab cakes.

Makes twelve large crab cakes.