

# Crayfish Fact Sheet

**Order:** *Decapoda*

**Family:** *Astacidae*

**Number of species in North America:** 280

**Size:** 10–150 mm

**Similar to:** Fresh Water Prawn

- Crayfish are generally brownish-green, speckled and mottled, while prawns are light-gray or cream-colored, and usually translucent.
- Both can change color depending on surroundings.

**Diet:** Will consume whatever is available. Primary diet decaying vegetation; also feed

on live snails, aquatic insects, scuds, small fish, and fish eggs.

**Food for:** Game fish, predaceous water insects.

**Habitat:** Shallow water of rivers, lakes, ponds, and swamps; hidden among rocks or debris.

**Movement:** Hide during day, crawl on legs at night. When disturbed, swim backward. Use tail for propulsion.

**Breathing:** Through gills—wave to circulate water into gill chambers.

**Water Quality Indicator:** Group II—can exist under a wide range of water quality conditions; a large number indicates *moderate* water quality.

**5 pairs of walking legs.**

**Cephalothorax**

(where head is fused with thorax).

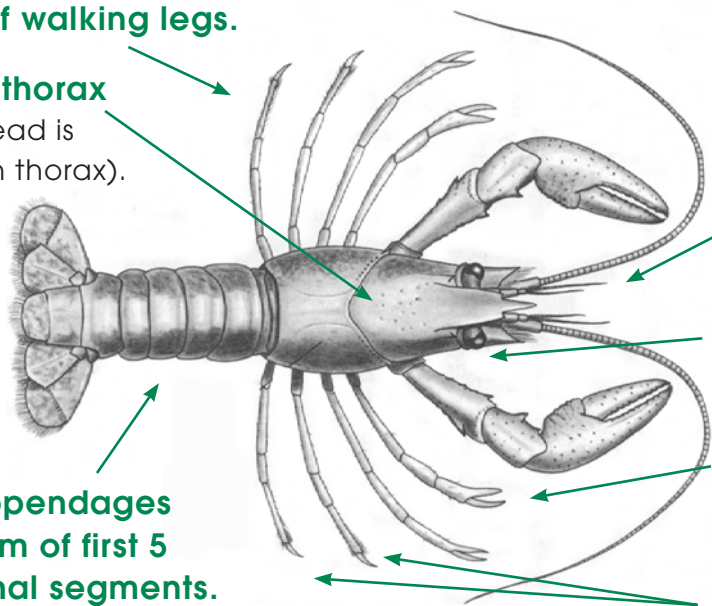
**1 pair of antenna much longer than other 2 pairs.**

**2 large, compound eyes.**

**First 2–3 pairs of walking legs have hinged claw.**

**Small appendages on bottom of first 5 abdominal segments.**

**Other legs have pointed tip.**

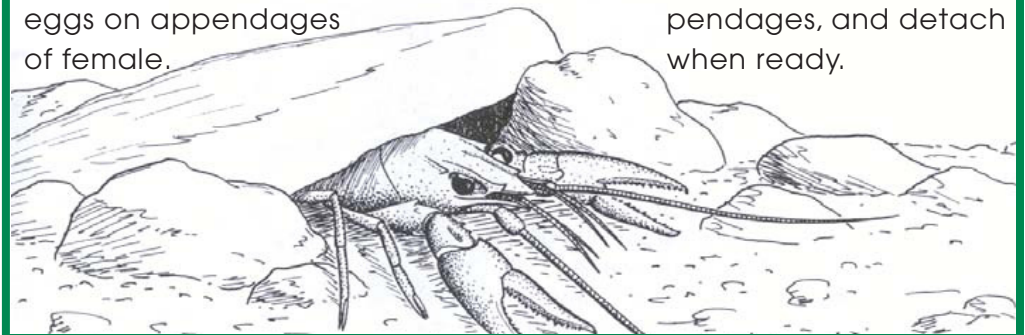


## Life Cycle Corner

### Incomplete Metamorphosis

Sticky substance holds 100–450 eggs on appendages of female.

When eggs hatch, the babies stick to the appendages, and detach when ready.



Images: McCafferty, W. Patrick. *Aquatic Entomology*, 1981.



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