

Crab

Can you walk **crabwise**? This is a term that means “sideways” or “in the manner of a crab.” It was created after watching crabs walk sideways, which is easier for their legs than walking forward or backward. Most crabs walk crabwise, although some walk forward or backward, and only some can swim. Crabs also have pinchers on their front two legs that they use for communication by drumming or waving them in the air. They also use them for protection and the males use them to fight with each other. Fiddler crabs use them to dig burrows in the sand or mud to hide in or rest in. Hermit crabs, king crabs, porcelain crabs, and horseshoe crabs are not “true crabs.”

Crabs are a type of **crustacean**. These kinds of animals have three body parts, the head, thorax (chest), and abdomen (belly). Crustaceans also have a thick shell, which is actually an exoskeleton or a skeleton that is on the outer part of the body instead of the inside like humans. This outer shell has to be regrown in larger sizes as the crustacean grows. The old shell is shed and left behind. This process is called molting. Most crabs like water and crabs can be found in all of the world’s oceans as well as in fresh water on land. Some crabs are terrestrial or land animals and don’t need to stay by the water. Most of the freshwater crabs are found in

tropical or semi-tropical climates. The largest crabs are the Japanese spider crabs. Their leg span can be up to 13 feet across! The smallest pea crabs are only a few millimeters wide.

Crabs are **omnivores**, meaning they will eat both plants and meat. Their main diet is algae, but they also like mollusks, worms, other crustaceans, fungi, and bacteria. Some also eat plankton and even fish. People like to eat crabs and they are farmed and caught in the oceans worldwide. The most eaten parts of crabs are the legs and claws, but the rest of the crab meat is also eaten. The soft-shell crab can be eaten whole, shell and all! Crabs are used in popular culture as well. The term “crabby” means grumpy or mean. The constellation of Cancer and the astrological sign for Cancer are named after the crab.



1. **New terms:** See how these three terms are used in the text, and write a definition next to each one.

crabwise

crustacean

omnivore

2. What are the pinchers on crabs front legs used for? _____

3. All crabs can swim.

True or False?

4. The Japanese spider crab is the largest species of crab and can have a leg span up to 13 feet across.

True or False?