

HOBO COOKING

**RECIPES FOR THESE
TOUGH TIMES**

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Introduction

America is fat, broke and ignorant about cooking.

We are in the middle of the worst recession since the Great Depression but Americans are fatter than ever (and dying from obesity). The out of work masses are turning to fast food and processed garbage, ignoring the many cheap alternatives that can be made in their own kitchens. Now, more than ever, inexpensive home cooking is a necessity.

So what are people supposed to do?

While I am definitely not the person to solve our country's problems, this little book is a step in the right direction. Honestly, basic cooking skills are as essential as learning to tell time, ride a bike or read a book.

Hobo Cooking is about being resourceful and thrifty. It's the food for getting through tough times. Quality affordable food is essential now more than ever, so I put together a small book of recipes and techniques to get people through the recession (although, as any hobo knows: cheap, good food is perfect anytime).

Please note that all cooking times and measurements are approximate at best and vague at worst. I did this intentionally because experimentation and improvisation is the best way to learn to cook well. So have fun, and don't worry, you can still eat your mistakes.

All-Purpose Hobo Stew

This is a simple stew that has potential for almost infinite variations. It starts with very humble (and of course, cheap) ingredients, but brought together they become something much more interesting. You can make the stew with just the essential ingredients (chickpeas, potato, tomato, and carrot) but the addition of meat, green vegetables or chicken stock can enrich the stew in different ways. Choose the version that appeals to you the most.

Ingredients:

1 onion

2-3 carrots

1-2 potatoes

Canned tomato (buy diced or use a can of whole tomatoes and chop them yourself)

1/2 pound of chickpeas, cooked. (canned would be fine if that is all you have)

Seasoning (paprika or curry powder)

Start by browning the onions and garlic in a little bit of oil. Salt them just a bit so they release their water. If you like, you could cook the onions long and slow (about 20-30 minutes) so they caramelize, but if you would rather just brown the onions that is easier and quicker.

Add the tomatoes and cook for a minute or two. Then add the cooked chickpeas, potatoes and carrots. Cover with water and cook very slowly for at least 45 minutes to an hour. Cook longer for a softer stew.

I season the stew with paprika and lots of black pepper, but curry powder is also be nice. Potatoes and chickpeas are fairly bland to begin with, so this dish should be seasoned generously.

This dish can be transformed into a heartier dish by replacing the water with chicken stock (see page 6-7), and more so by adding meat (cube and brown the meat in oil before adding to the stew). Green beans or kale added towards the end of cooking would make this dish a bit healthier and greener.

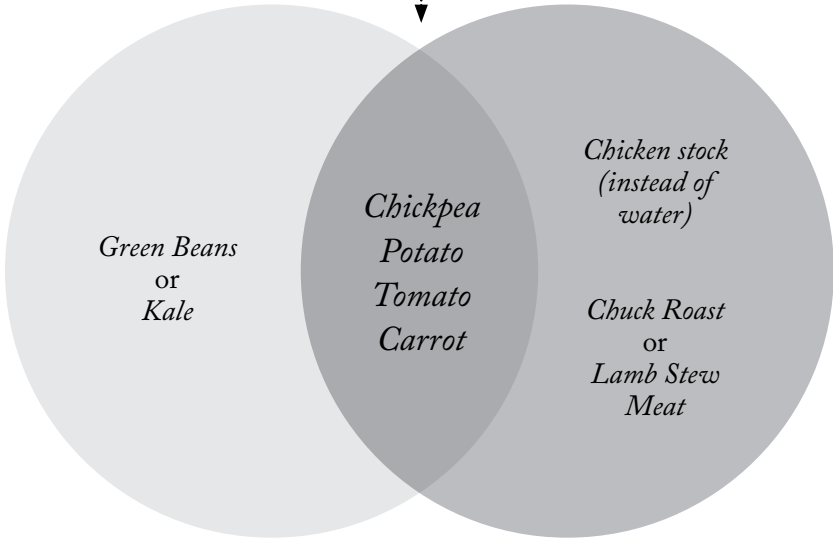
Grated parmesan chese and parsley make a good garnish for this dish.

For a less rustic-looking stew, you could let the whole dish cool, and then purée in the blender until smooth.

*Essential
Ingredients*

More Vegetables

More Meat



.....

Combine everything if you prefer



Chicken Stock

Stock is essentially flavorful liquid that is made by boiling bones, meat and vegetables. It's a useful thing to have around because it can be the base for many dishes. Sometimes the bones are roasted before they are boiled (for a darker stock), but not always. I know that 89¢ can of Swanson's Chicken Broth looks like a good deal, but it really isn't. That stuff has none of the flavor or body of the real homemade stuff. Save your money and make the good stuff at home. You can use it for all kinds of soups, sauces and risottos. The good news is that the raw materials for chicken stock are essentially trash (to most people), so they come cheap.

To start, you will need some kind of chicken carcass. There are a few ways to go about this. One option is a picked over roast chicken carcass. That means basically everything that is left over after all or most of the meat is removed. This a good method because you can get a lot of meals out of one bird.

Or you could go with fresh chicken parts. The cheaper ones work best. You want a high bone-to-meat ratio. Try chicken necks, breastbones, feet, wings etc. If you don't see them in the supermarket meat case, ask the butcher.

Stewing chickens are another good option if you can find them. These can be tricky to find sometimes, but if you spot one, grab it. "Stewing Hens" are usually older egg-laying birds. They are not so good for eating, but superb for making stock. I find mine for \$5 at my local farmer's market. It comes with head and feet and everything, and I just put the whole animal in the pot. I usually shut the lid so it isn't looking at me.

Turkey necks are widely available and they work pretty well. Yes, I know a turkey is not a chicken, but turkey necks are huge, so if you have a few of them, they make an excellent substitute for the others.

To make the stock:

Place your bones at the bottom of the largest stockpot you own. Fill the pot with enough cold water to cover the bones by an inch or two. Turn on the heat to low. The water should just barely be trembling. A violent, bubbling boil will make dirty, dishwasher-looking stock.

Add the vegetables. Onions, carrots and celery are the most traditional vegetables used in stock (i.e. French *mirepoix*), but leeks and garlic can also be a nice addition. Just use what you have around.

If the stock is slowly bubbling and there is enough water to cover everything, there isn't much for you to do now but wait. Pay attention to the gross foam that floats to the top. Skim that off with a spoon or ladle. Let it simmer for 2-3 hours. Try to stir as little as possible.

After your stock has simmered low and slow for a couple of hours, your stock is almost done. Flavor and gelatin has been extracted from the bones and vegetables and now it is time to check the seasoning. Add a bit of salt, but not too much. You can always add more later.

Strain your stock using an ordinary colander, or if you have cheesecloth or something with a finer mesh, use that. I usually portion the stock into smaller-portion containers and freeze. Stock will keep for about a month or more in the freezer.

Pinto Beans (or any bean, really)

You can do a lot with regular old beans. I make a huge pot of them all the time and usually find something to do with them. You can refry them, put them in chili, eat them plain or whatever else you can think of. They are cheap and filling, and there is no reason why you should not have beans on hand at all times.

Most bean recipes require overnight soaking or super long cooking times, but really, 90 minutes should do the trick. The key is using a cooking vessel that works on both the stove and in the oven.

Ingredients:

One sack of beans (about 1 pound)

3 cloves of garlic

Cover the beans with plenty of cold water.

Preheat the oven to 250°.

Bring the beans to a boil on the stove top (about 15 minutes).

Cover the pot and put the whole dish in the oven. Let the beans cook for 75 minutes.

45 minutes in, check on the beans, stir, add ½ Tbs salt and the garlic cloves.

When your 75 minutes are up, taste the beans for doneness and seasoning.

Note:

This recipe works for any other type of dry bean such as chickpeas, black beans, kidney beans, etc. Cooking times may vary by a few minutes, so be sure to check your beans from time to time.

Cornbread

A cheap, easy and quick bread. Cornbread goes especially well with pinto beans or just about any stew. You could cook the same batter in a muffin or brownie pan, but it just wouldn't be the same.

Ingredients:

3 Tbs of the cooking fat of your choice (bacon grease is good here)

1 ¼ cup cornmeal

¾ cup flour

2 Tbs sugar

1 tsp kosher salt

1 cup buttermilk

1 egg

optional: jalapeños, corn, cheese.

Preheat oven to 400°.

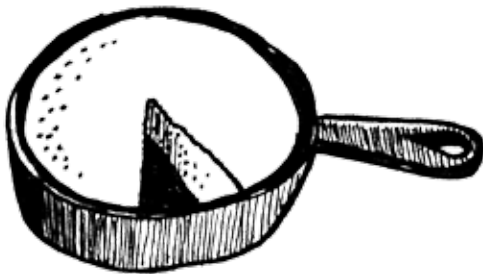
Mix dry and wet ingredients separately.

Combine until just mixed. Don't overdo it.

Oil up a cast iron skillet and dump the mixture in.

Bake for about 20 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean.

Serve as triangle pie-shaped pieces.



Ramen & Egg

Instant ramen noodles are super cheap, and even though they are the obvious choice for eating cheaply, most people overlook the potential that these weird little noodle bricks contain. Most people prepare them according to the instructions on the packaging, and that is usually fine, but if you tweak the process a little, you end up with a vastly superior meal. Ramen noodles work better if you try to think about them in terms of being an actual noodle soup (like the real Japanese dish) and not just crummy 2 a.m. dorm food.

Ingredients:

Packaged instant ramen noodles

1 egg

Green onion

Chicken broth

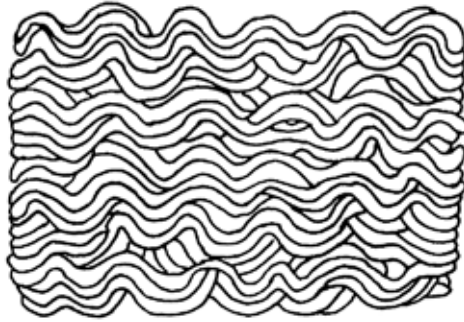
Spinach or other greens

Boil a few cups of water in a saucepan. Use less water than the packaging recommends for a thicker broth.

Once the water is boiling, now it is time to flavor the water. If you don't, then you are stuck with just wet noodles — and nobody likes that. You could add the flavor packet that comes with ramen at this time, but they tend to be about 90% salt and MSG so I only use part of it, if I use it at all. For flavor and body, add some chicken stock or maybe add some sliced onions.

Since this dish is mostly salt and carbs, it might be a good idea to add something green if you have it around. Spinach is the best choice. It will wilt quickly when you throw it in the water.

Add the noodles. Cook them for less time than the package suggests if you want your noodles to have any texture.



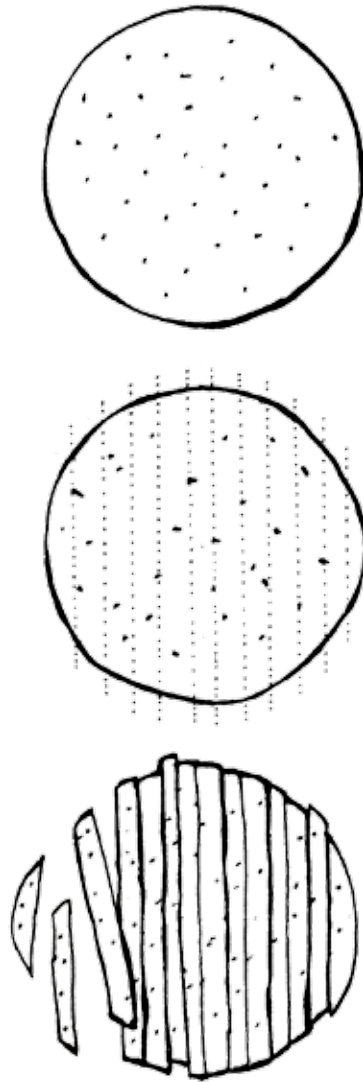
Give the soup a good stir so a whirlpool forms in the center of the saucepan and gently add an egg. Slam on the lid and turn down the heat to almost nothing until the egg firms up. Don't stir it after this unless you want tiny chunks of scrambled eggs in your soup instead of a pretty poached egg. You could also hard boil (or even better, soft boil) the egg beforehand and add it towards the end. Top it off with some thinly-sliced green onions. It looks pretty and it tastes nice.

Optional:

If you have a little bit of extra meat laying around, chop it into bite-sized pieces and add it before you add the noodles.

Note:

This recipe is written with the mainstream supermarket brands of ramen noodles in mind. It also works with the better (and slightly more expensive) brands of ramen that you can buy at Asian markets. I think the Korean brand *Nong Shim* is best.



Tortilla cutting technique

Tortilla Soup

This is a dish that can be as fancy or as simple as you want it to be. If you have a lot of the base ingredients sitting around, this can be prepared quickly and easily.

Ingredients:

Soup base (tomato, onion, garlic, jalapeño)

Chicken stock

Corn tortillas (stale ones are best)

Shredded or diced chicken (not essential, but chicken makes it more of a meal)

Garnishes: a sliver of avocado, sour cream, sprigs of cilantro (these fancy ingredients might take this dish out of hobo budgets, and are optional)

Prepare the soup base. Sometimes I just use old salsa (homemade), but if you don't have that, it's pretty easy to put together. Take two tomatoes, some onion (1-½), a few cloves of garlic and a bit of jalapeño and purée them in a food processor or blender. Heat up some oil in a stockpot or dutch oven, and pour in the salsa-like soup base. It should bubble and fry, and generally lose some moisture and darken in color. Frying this stuff forms the main flavor base for the rest of the soup.

Next add plenty of chicken stock and some vegetables for extra flavor. Add onions for sure, but zucchini, garbanzo beans might also be welcome. Add the chicken at this time if you have some.

Everything should simmer (slowly) for at least 30 minutes to let the flavors mix and mingle, so while you are doing that...

Heat up ¼-½ inch of neutral vegetable oil like canola or corn in a heavy pan (a cast iron skillet would be best).

Take your corn tortillas and slice them into thin strips. Fry them in the hot oil until they become golden and crispy. Season the fried strips with salt when you are done.

Ladle the soup into bowls and top with any garnishes you might have — and, of course, the tortilla strips.

Portuguese Caldo Verde Soup

This soup shows off the best parts of broke-ass peasant cuisine. It is simple, filling, borderline-healthy and very easy to prepare. It also sounds like something much more fancy than it actually is.

Ingredients:

2-3 ordinary russet potatoes (diced)

An onion, diced

A few garlic cloves, chopped

Kale, chopped

Portuguese linguica sausage (other spiced, smoked sausages might also work)

Heat up some oil in a large stockpot or dutch oven. Olive oil is probably best, but use what you have. Sauté the onion until transparent; then, add the garlic. Add a bit of salt during this step so the onions release their water and cook better. Toss in the diced potatoes and cook for about 5 minutes; then cover with plenty of water.

Cook the potatoes for about 30-40 minutes until they are soft. Mash with a potato masher so the potatoes are mostly broken up and they form a nice, starchy broth. Slice the sausage and add it to the broth until it is warmed through. You can pre-cook the sausage in oil before if you like.

Add the kale and cook until it softens. This takes about 5 minutes.

Ladle into bowls and serve.

Optional:

Drizzle a bit of olive oil on top and serve with toasted bread.



Split Pea Soup

This dish is ridiculously easy and cheap to prepare. Everybody's grandma probably has a recipe for this stuff, but here is how I make it.

The soup gets most of its body from a smoked ham hock (or two). Smoked ham hocks are among the cheapest things out there, because they contain hardly any meat. They are mostly connective tissue and bone. Bad for regular eating, perfect for making a soup. If you don't want to use ham hocks, try smoked turkey legs, wings or necks.

Ingredients:

Smoked ham hock (1 or 2)

1 bag of split peas (about a pound)

1 large onion, diced

Empty a bag of split green peas into a large saucepan or dutch oven. Pick out any weird-looking peas or rocks you find. Run the pot under the sink (changing the water a few times as needed) to clean the peas. Leave enough water in there so that the peas have lots of room to expand.

Add diced onions and a smoked ham hock. Turn on the heat and allow the pot to simmer slowly for 1-1 ½ hours.

The peas should be nice and mushy, but if you want a finer texture, run the soup through a blender or food processor. (Remove the ham hock first!)

Ladle into bowls and garnish with ham if you have it. I think it works just fine served with just bread or crackers.

Carne Asada Tacos

When you are on a budget, it can be pretty hard to afford beef steaks. If you broaden your horizons a bit, it's not so hard. You won't be eating *Chateaubriand* on these tacos, but it doesn't really matter. A cheap cut of beef is probably better for this dish anyways.

Cheaper cuts of meat are usually cheap because they contain plenty of connective tissue or fat. For our purposes, these are not really bad things, if the meat is prepared in certain ways. This is where Mexican butchers come in handy. Usually they offer a very thin sliced cut of meat for only a couple of bucks per pound. If you don't have access to a Mexican butcher, ask your normal butcher to slice some beef shoulder or sirloin very thinly. If your butcher will not do this for you, find a new one.

These super-thin cuts of steak can be improved with a little bit of a marinade, but the meat is so thin, it only needs to be marinated for 5-10 minutes. Put the meat slices in a bowl, add a bit of salt and pepper or maybe some soy sauce or lime. Use your imagination.

Heat up a large iron skillet. Almost full blast, but not quite.

Cook the thin steaks on the skillet. They should cook quickly but make sure to leave plenty of pink, as they will continue to cook after you take them off the heat.

Move the cooked meat aside and start to cook corn tortillas on the skillet.

Chop the steak and fill the tortillas.

Garnish the tacos with a squeeze of lime. Diced onions and cilantro will also be nice. Add guacamole or plain avocado if you are feeling fancy.



Picadillo Tacos

This is more of a Tex-Mex style of beef taco. This is probably the finest (non-hamburger) use of cheap ground beef. In this case, the cheaper (i.e. high fat) stuff is actually preferable to the more expensive lean stuff. You will need less meat than you think, because the potatoes stretch the meat.

Ingredients:

Ground beef chuck

1 large onion, diced

A few cloves of garlic, diced

1 potato, diced

Possibly a carrot

Generous tablespoons of chili powder

Flour tortillas (this is Tex-Mex)

Bring out a large, wide saucepan or iron skillet. If you own both, use your saucepan for the meat and the iron skillet to heat up tortillas.

Fry the onions and garlic in a bit of oil. Once the onions are transparent, add the potato.

Brown the ground beef in the mixture and stir frequently. This dish is at it's best when the potatoes pick up a bit of the beef grease.

As the meat browns, season everything with chili powder, generous amounts of black pepper, salt, and cumin if you have it. Garlic or onion powder wouldn't hurt either.

Serve the meat mixture (picadillo) in warm tortillas and top with salsa (fresh or bottled).

Red Beans & Rice

The classic Louisiana Creole dish. Of course, there is a lot more going on here than than just beans and rice.

Ingredients:

1 lb kidney beans

1 lb sausage, chopped on the bias (andouille or boudin is best).

1 large onion

2-4 rib celery

1 green bell pepper

A hell of a lot more garlic than you think you need

Bottle of beer, preferably Abita, (If you don't have that, use the cheap stuff).

Some chicken stock

2-3 bay leaves

A small handful of thyme

Bacon, however much you want

A couple of shakes of bitters

Cayenne pepper powder

Soak the beans overnight, drain and set aside, but don't bother cleaning the pot. Save it for the next steps.

Fry the bacon on medium heat in the same pot, remove it when it's crisp; add the sausage in with the bacon and fry for about five minutes. Set aside the bacon and sausage.

Throw in the trinity (onion, celery, and bell pepper) and sauté in the oil until the onions become soft and translucent. Add garlic, thyme, cayenne, and bitters and continue cooking.

Put the meat and beans back in the pot. Drain your beer into the pot and add enough stock to cover everything by an inch or two and add bay leaves.

Simmer low and slow for 2-3 hours, stirring every hour or so.

For a thicker consistency, ladle on third of the stew into a blender, and purée. Add the contents of the blender jar back into the pot and stir.

Serve over rice with cornbread and drink the rest of the beer.

Dirty Rice

Another southern classic. Some people make this dish with sausage instead of chicken livers, but that just isn't right. Liver, along other organ meats, are almost always the cheapest item in the butcher case. Make sure to buy the freshest livers you can, because they tend to spoil faster than other parts of the bird. Chicken gizzards also make a nice addition to this dish and they add that extra touch of offal goodness.

Ingredients:

2 cups rice

½ lb. chicken livers (and ¼ lb. gizzards)

1 onion

1-2 rib celery

1 red bell pepper

2-3 cloves garlic

Cayenne pepper powder

Chicken stock

Finely dice the celery, bell pepper, onion and garlic. Set aside.

Chop the livers and sauté in butter or oil until browned.

Add the onions and keep cooking. When the onions turn translucent, add the celery, red pepper, and garlic.

Pour in the rice, give everything a good stir and then add the stock. Make sure everything is covered by about ¼-½ inch of liquid.

Turn down the heat to low and cover the dish with a tight fitting lid. Let it simmer for 20 minutes. Remove the lid, fluff the rice and serve.

Spaghetti with Anchovy, Peas & Egg

This dish is very simple to make and it only takes the amount of time required to boil water. All the cooking takes place very quickly at the end, so while your water is boiling, have everything ready and within reach so you can be prepared. Not everyone likes anchovies, but when used with care and moderation, they really add a lot to a dish. The lemon cancels out any fishy flavor from the anchovies.

Ingredients:

Spaghetti

Frozen peas (defrost in cold water, drain)

2-3 anchovy filets (take them out of the tin or jar and soak them in olive oil)

½ lemon

¼ stick of butter, cubed

A few cloves of garlic, chopped

Grated parmesan cheese

Start a large pot of water boiling, and salt the water to taste.

Boil the pasta until it is al dente (usually a minute or two less than the package suggests). Drain the pasta and briefly set aside in a bowl.

Using the same pot you cooked the pasta in, briefly cook the anchovy on high heat, until it begins to break up. Add the garlic. Remember to work fast now — your pasta is getting cold.

Add the warm pasta back to the pot, then add the peas, and allow them to warm up. Be sure to stir the pasta around so it picks up everything.

Add the butter and lemon juice. Keep stirring.

Crack an egg into the pasta. It begins to mesh with the other ingredients, and it makes a kind of sauce (similar to Spaghetti Carbonara).

Top with parsley, black pepper, and parmesan cheese.



Pasta Fagioli

Pasta and beans. That's really all this dish is. It's really nice because it brings two ordinary pantry staples and turns them into something great.

Ingredients:

1 batch of cooked white beans seasoned with 1 branch rosemary (see page 8)

1 onion, finely diced

3 garlic cloves, chopped

1 carrot, finely diced

1 stick celery, finely diced

2 cloves

1-2 bay leaf

1 can diced tomatoes

Diced bacon or pancetta (optional, but it really helps)

Heat a large skillet and cook the diced bacon until nearly browned.

When the bacon is almost done, add the *mirepoix* (onions, carrots and celery).

Sauté until soft, then add cloves and bay leaf. Add a cup of wine or stock to deglaze the pan. (Water or juice from the tomato can would work if you don't have wine or stock around). Scrape up any little brown bits that were stuck to the bottom of the pan.

Add the can of tomatoes and the beans (the beans should be drained).

Simmer for about 30-40 minutes over low heat to let all the flavors blend.

Toss and serve with cooked spaghetti, or add stock in the last step and serve with smaller pasta (like elbow macaroni) for more of a soup-like dish.

Crabbing

If you live on the coast, one of the cheapest ways of getting food is catching it yourself. Fishing is fine, but it usually requires lots of luck, time and equipment. The real way to go is crabbing. All you need is a net. These things cost anywhere from \$5-\$50. In most cases the cheap ones will do just fine. I have heard of success with nothing more than bait and rope* (the crab hangs on to the bait, even as the rope is being pulled up) but I have never had this kind of success myself. Oh yeah, be sure to check out your local crabbing regulations.

Most crab nets are actually baskets attached to a rope with bait in the middle. As the basket is lowered to the sea floor, the basket flattens and the crabs have easy access to the bait in the middle. When the basket is pulled up, the basket walls come up around the crab and the poor creatures are trapped. The crabs seal their own fate by doing their best to stay as close to the bait as possible.

Crab baits vary by region, budget and personal preference, but as a general rule, crabs like just about any kind of gross, stinky and decaying flesh. They are scavengers, after all. Filet mignon will be wasted on these guys. Go for something like chicken necks or wings, or maybe a little bit of squid. If you are using a crab basket, something bony is good since it is hard for that stuff to fall through.

As you catch a few regulation-size crabs, toss them in a bucket (while briefly observing them getting all territorial and crabby).

Once you get these delicious buggers home, depending on the size and species, you could steam, roast or boil these guys. I will leave that part up to you.

**In the San Francisco Bay area you need a bait cage attached to the bottom of your crab net or sea lions will steal your bait in a matter of minutes. Bait cages can be purchased at any bait shop. I suggest securing the bait cage with a zip-tie.*

1

Gently drop the baited net into the water and let it fall to the bottom. Once it has gone all the way down, tie the rope to the pier.

2

Leave the crab net alone for 10-20 minutes. Hang out, and have a beer or something. If there are crabs nearby, they will smell your bait and wander

3

Pull up the net quickly so crabs can't escape. If your crabs aren't legal, toss them back. If you have keepers, put them in a bucket and try for more.

