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cray·fish 🦀 (krā fīsh') also **craw·fish** (krô -)

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n. pl. **crayfish** or **cray·fish·es** also **crawfish** or **craw·fish·es**

1. Any of various freshwater crustaceans of the families Astacidae and Cambaridae of the Northern Hemisphere and the family Parastacidae of the Southern Hemisphere, resembling a lobster but considerably smaller. Also called *mudbug*; also called regionally *crawdad*.

2. See [spiny lobster](#).

[By folk etymology from Middle English *crevise*, from Old French *crevice*, perhaps from Old High German *krebiz*, edible crustacean; see **gerbh-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

Word History: The crayfish, also known as the crawfish, owes its name to a misunderstanding. The actual source of the word may be the Old High German word *krebiz*, "edible crustacean," or a word related to it. From this Germanic source came Old French *crevice*, which when taken into English became *crevise* (first recorded in a document written in 1311-1312). In Old French and Middle English these words designated the crayfish. People began to pronounce and spell the last part of this word as if it were *fish*, the first *fish* spelling being recorded in 1555. Because of a variation in Anglo-Norman pronunciation, two forms of the word have come down to Modern English: *crayfish* and *crawfish*.

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Indo-European & Semitic Roots Appendices

Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

[Indo-European Roots](#)

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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