

How they are caught

Catching shellfish is a small-scale operation, one of the most sustainable and environmentally-friendly ways of fishing. Crabs and lobsters are caught in static pots that sit on the seabed, while spider crabs are caught in static tangle nets—no dredging or towing involved. This means the boats are only out for a few hours at a time, using little fuel and leaving the seabed and marine life undisturbed.

Traditionally round inkwell pots for lobster and brown crab would have been made from withies, crafted by the fishermen themselves during the quiet winter months. Today they are mostly made from plastic-coated steel. Longer and rectangular, the crabs and lobsters have room to move around until the pots are lifted. Any crabs or lobsters that are immature, too small or in poor condition are put back into the sea to grow on for another day. During the main season, the pots are usually lifted every couple of days. The catch is back on-shore within a few hours.

Tangle nets have a large mesh size so that only spider crabs are targeted. They are fixed to the seabed in rocky areas where shellfish like to hide. There is no by-catch and during the season, from April onwards, nets are checked each day.

Shellfish are caught all around the Cornish coast and the boats used for catching shellfish range from single-handed 14ft cove boats, based in Sennen Cove, to the larger 60ft crabbers from Newlyn.