Surf Fishing
The Quick Start Guide To
This Exciting Sport

By Randy Meyers
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Chapter I  Introduction To Surf Fishing

You Don't Need To Spend A lot Money To Get Started

If you are just getting into surf fishing it isn't necessary to invest in top quality gear. As in any sport these days there is the ultimate gear that won't do anything to make a beginner an expert. My recommendation is to select gear that will get the job done in the hands of a beginner until you determine that this sport is something you will enjoy for a long time.

The best place to start is a combo rod & reel that you can find in one of the big sporting good stores or on-line tackle sites for or around $50. Be sure it's a saltwater set. Sometimes these combos will even come already spooled with line. I would recommend visiting a brick and mortar store over an Internet site for your first purchase because you can see and handle what you will buy.

Use the Surf Tackle Checklist to round out the rest of your gear and you can easily get away with a $100 or less. There isn't too many sports you can get into with a $100 investment. Especially one that provides this much fun and excitement.

At this price point you will have everything you need too get out and enjoy the sport that has addicted many an angler. Eventually, when you decide this sport is for you, then gradually add rods and reels of better quality to your preference. By that time you'll have a better idea what you want and why. Most surf anglers have several rods and reels for different ways they like to fish.

Surf Fishing Fundamentals

To get started in this exciting sport it is essential to understand how and why surf fishing gear is used. You don't have to look too far to find lots of recommendations for equipment. For someone just starting out this makes it difficult to decide just how to get setup. Take some time to get an understanding of the fundamentals and you will be able choose the gear that works best for you.

The first place to start is to choose a rod and reel. If you have ever observed anglers fishing from the beach you probably noticed that the rods are usually much longer. The longer rods allow for greater casting distances. If you were to choose a rod for your first purchase, let me say this, a longer rod will cast short or long distances but a shorter rod can only cast shorter distances. So therefore, a longer rod makes for a better first choice. However, not too long. Rods longer than 12' are much more difficult to cast. A good choice would be to find something you like between 10' and 12'.

Most of the time you will be using live or frozen bait as opposed to artificial bait. Common baits used are shrimp, clams, bloodworms, sand fleas, squid, mullet and forms of cut bait.
With any of the choices for bait you will be using one of the common surf rigs that are popular. Two of the most common are the “fish finder rig” and the “fireball rig”. Surf rigs can be purchased or hand made to your preference depending on the type of fish in the surf at that time.

Artificial bait and lures are also popular among surf anglers and are available in many forms and colors. Knowing when and how to use them, can be very effective in the hands of an experienced surf angler.

The fish are usually found in the deeper surf pockets between the sandbars. As such, surf fishing requires learning techniques to cast greater distances than any other type of fishing.

Learning to read the surf and the conditions that are productive is of prime importance for successful results.

**How To Get The Most From This Surf Fish Manual**

At first it will seem like there’s a lot to learn to become a successful surf angler. Don't let that deter you from taking up this fantastic sport. It's very easy to assimilate everything you need to know. Start with the basics. Incorporate what you learn in this manual. Use the knowledge and techniques you learn here and easily put them to use at the surf line.

You'll be amazed how quickly you will get results. Once you hook your first fish you'll be hooked as well. (No pun intended).

**It's All Here, Read It, Apply It, It's Up To You**

Everything you need to know about surf fishing can be found in this manual. As you read through the material you will acquire knowledge that otherwise would have taken years to learn on your own.

Use the manual as you would if you had a personal instructor. Once you know where to start and what to do the rest will fall into place. By applying the information found here you will be more knowledgeable than than most of the surf anglers who are out there trying to catch fish.

The investment to get started is nominal. There isn't another sport out there that provides so much pleasure for the investment involved as in the sport of surf fishing.
Chapter II  Understanding the Surf and Fishing Conditions

How To Identify Good Surf Fishing Conditions

What are the factors to consider for good surfing conditions? If you wanted to optimize your fishing results, you would try to advantage of as many good surf fishing conditions as possible. This is not always easy to do. Each of the factors that go into good fishing opportunities function on a different cycle. When the cycles overlap together at the same time you would be able to optimize your fishing productivity.

It isn't necessary to have multiple factors in your favor in order to catch fish. Fish have to eat on a regular basis to survive. Sometimes this need is interrupted and the fishing won't be so good. As long as you understand the factors that influence the quality of fishing you will be able to use it to your advantage. So lets consider the different kinds of factors that effect fishing conditions.

Time of day

Experienced surf anglers prefer daybreak, early dusk and into the evening hours. These are the best times of day when the fish are feeding actively. This is one of the conditions you can start with when planning a outing. The time of day is an easy predictable pattern.

Tides

The tide changes are regulated by the rotation of the moon around the earth. The tide changes approximately four times a day producing two high tides and two low tides alternating between high and low tide. The timing of high and low tide changes a little each day and is different for each coastal location. As the flow of water moves with the tide it moves the bait with it and triggers feeding by the predator fish.

Fish have four ways they search out their food. From strongest to weakest they are scent, sound, sight and feel. Scent is the strongest because it can be sensed over the greatest distance in water. Tidal currents carry the scent to the fish. This enables them to hone in on their location. This explains why knowing the tidal time changes can be so important.

The local bait shops will usually post the tidal times for high and low tide. You can obtain a tide chart for your area from them or check the local paper for published times. The widow of opportunity is about 2 hours on either side of high tide for surf fishing.

Plan your outings around the high tide window when it also occurs at the best times of day to fish, which is around early morning and dusk. These are two predictable conditions that you can plan for in advance. Later in this manual you will learn to use low tide to scout out productive opportunities.
Wind direction

The wind is one variable you can't count on. When the wind is blowing on shore at a direct or indirect angle to the beach expect better fishing. High winds are not conducive at all to good fishing. A steady wind on shore with surf that isn't too rough is what you're looking for.

Seasonal Migrations & Water Temperature

Seasonal migrations of fish present excellent opportunities to limit out on a days catch. Game fish move as the water temperature and weather changes. Water temperature and weather also effects available bait fish to feed on. When a cold front comes through the shrimp will bury themselves in the sand until it warms up again. As the temperature of the water drops, fish metabolism slows and they become more sluggish. They do not feed as often. Listed below is a chart showing the preferred water temperature of popular saltwater game fish to use as a guide.

As you spend more time at the surf you will learn the seasonal habits of the fish in your area. In the next section you'll learn how to use a log to understand the patterns that effect fish behavior.

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<th>Species</th>
<th>Lower Avoidance</th>
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<th>Upper Avoidance</th>
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<tr>
<td>Amberjack</td>
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<td>Atlantic Bonito</td>
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<td>Chinook (King) Salmon</td>
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<td>Coho (Silver) Salmon</td>
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<tr>
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<td>White Seabass</td>
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<td>Winter Flounder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yellowtail (Pacific)</td>
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*Keep a Log to Determine Fishing Patterns*

Improve your catch rate by keeping a log or journal. Logs are very valuable for keeping track of situations and analyzing patterns that become apparent. You will be amazed what you are able to learn with this simple technique. Patterns that weren't obvious to you otherwise will stand out right away by reviewing the data collected in your log.

In every activity there are those individuals that are naturals. They excel easily and quickly master the skills that put them at the top. They assimilate knowledge and skills without even realizing it. If you're not a natural you can change that by keeping a log of data by collecting it each time you go out to the surf.

Use a small spiral note pad of your choice and record, date, time of day, tidal pattern, weather conditions, wind direction, air temperature, water temperature and barometric pressure dropping or rising. Take notes as to results of fish caught, location in the surf, species and bait or lure used. Add comments and other information regarding how you fished and the results. After recording several entries in your log you will begin to notice the patterns.

Over time you will accumulate enough data to maximize your chances of catching fish and improve the numbers of fish caught. The knowledge you gain will allow you to adjust your tactics for the best results.
Use The Weather To Your Advantage

Changes in the weather effect fish behavior. Especially when a cold front comes through. Cold fronts have a negative effect on fishing while warm fronts have a positive effect. When a front comes through sometimes it take several days for the fish to return to regular habits again. They need time to become acclimated to the change. The change in weather changes their movements their feeding habits and the habits of their food supply.

Use the weather as a tool to predict how the fish will react. Determine whether it's worth the effort to spend time fishing. Look ahead at the changing weather forecasts to plan days at the surf.

How Ocean Currents Effect Surf Fishing

Ocean currents effect the temperature of the water and the movement of fish and their prey. Learning about the currents found in your fishing location will certainly improve results. At different times with the seasonal changes the fish are migrating with the changing water temperature. They follow their food supply and the preferred water temperature.

Not all fish are migratory. Some species can always be found in the surf. Over time you will learn what to expect from the seasonal changes and the ocean currents in your area. You can learn a lot quickly by visiting the Internet forums, talking to fellow surf casters and visiting local bait shops.
Chapter III   Putting Together A Killer Surf Tackle Collection

Choosing Surf Fishing Tackle

Choosing surf fishing tackle for the beginner can be an overwhelming experience. Any visit to the fishing department of a sporting goods retailer provides the shopper with such a myriad of choices that it becomes impossible to determine what they need.

In this chapter I hope to simplify that with explanations of tackle used and the purpose of it as it applies to the surf angler. Don't expect to purchase anything that looks good without knowing how and when to use it. It also isn't necessary to own every variation of an item just to assure the chances of catching fish. A small selection of the right gear is all you're ever going to need. After that it becomes more of a collectors hobby of products that you may never even use. Lets face it, if you can catch fish with good results on a small collection of equipment why is there a need to own any additional equipment unless it serves a purpose that you don't possess. Many surf anglers will own a variety of rods and reels for different purposes and ways they like to fish but it isn't a vanity issue.

Lets start with an explanation of rods.

How Do You Know Which Surf Rod Is For You

This is an excerpt from the Tackle Warehouse that sells high end rods. It will provide a good explanation of the characteristics that go into the design of fishing rod.

**Action:** This describes how much of the rod deflects (bends) when you put pressure on the tip. A fast action rod will bend in only the top third or less of the blank, a medium or moderate action will bend in the top half or so and a slow action will bend starting in the lower third of the rod. Sometimes slow action rods are termed 'parabolic', meaning the bend of the rod is similar throughout the length. This description is subject to the type of rod you may be talking about at the time; a fast action fly rod or steelhead rod will bend much lower and more easily than a fast action bass rod or offshore rod.

Most bass rods actions for example are fast to very fast because this action generally provides better sensitivity and faster power for hook-setting. By faster power we mean the rod 'shuts off' faster, or the bend ends higher on the blank, which means you don't have to move the rod as far on the hook set to get into the stiffer part of the blank. Fast action rods are great for most applications where a short to long casting distance is involved and single hooks are the rule, such as worm and jig fishing.

Medium and medium-fast rods will usually provide a little more casting distance and still provide adequate hook-setting power. These actions are often used for applications that involve treble hooks, such as crankbaits and topwater lures or other reaction baits such as spinnerbaits. The 'bite' of a treble hook is not as deep as a big single worm hook and it is
easier to tear the hook out of a strong fish, plus the slower action will not pull the lure out of the fish's mouth before it fully engulfs it. The type of lure you use will usually determine the action of the rod you should use.

**Taper:** Often used synonymously with "action", taper describes not only the thickness of the rod but also the thickness of the wall of the blank and where along the blank less material is used allowing more bend. For our purposes taper is the same as action.

**Power:** This describes the strength of the rod or it's lifting power. When someone says this rod has a lot of backbone, they mean it has a lot of power. Power ratings are usually describes as heavy, medium heavy, medium, etc. Power is closely related to the line strength; heavier power rods will handle heavy line weights and lighter powers will be good for light lines. It is fairly important to keep your line test within the limits printed on the rod since a heavy power rod will snap light lines too easily and heavy lines can snap a light rod. Power ratings vary by the type of rod described; a heavy bass rod and a heavy offshore rod will definitely not feel the same. One might be rated for 25lb line and the other for 80lb line.

The type of water you're fishing will help determine the power of the rod you should select. Thick, heavy cover will require a strong rod to get the fish out before it can tie you up. Clear, open water will often require thin, hard to see lines in order to get bit, meaning you will need a lighter power rod.

**Responsiveness:** Related to modulus this is an idea that reflects the ability of the entire rod to flex under load and release the stored energy in the cast. A finished rod may be the result of different layers of different material, all of which contributes to the responsiveness of the rod. One thing is for sure, the lighter the rod, especially the tip, the more responsive it will be. Weight is the deterrent to performance. Overall, the higher the modulus the more efficiently it will store and release energy, which gives you the ability to flick an accurate cast on a lower trajectory.

**Graphite:** This is the most common material used in building bass rods today and was first introduced in the 70's by Fenwick. These days graphite is produced using extremely high temperatures in a two-part process, one to create tensile strength and one for stiffness. Temperatures sometimes exceed 3000 degrees! Generally the hotter the furnace in each process the more tensile strength and stiffness the fibers have, which means you need less material to build a rod, and the rods you do build can be lighter and more sensitive.

High tensile strength is sometimes called high strain, and the stiffness is known as tensile modulus or just modulus. To build a rod with high modulus and without high tensile strength creates a brittle rod. That's how some brands can advertise high modulus graphite rods with a cheap price; not all the expensive steps in the graphite making process are completed, giving you an inferior rod.
To reach these extreme temperatures costs a lot of money and the best graphite is very expensive. The parallel graphite fibers created by the heating process are then incorporated into sheets with a resin. You can reduce the cost of materials by using more resin and less graphite, but you end up with a softer rod. You'll need to add more material for a stiffer action, resulting in a heavier, less sensitive rod.

Another layer of fibers is laid onto the sheets of graphite fibers and resin perpendicular to the graphite fibers. This second layer, called the scrim, is almost always fiberglass. The exceptions to this rule are the G. Loomis GLX and the St. Croix SC4 graphite, which incorporate carbon or graphite instead of fiberglass, creating a very expensive and rare material.

The best rods get their specific actions by using a variety of materials, and by using layers of different graphite and/or fiberglass. It's not that difficult to produce a graphite rod, and more and more rods are being built offshore, many in huge plants in China. As we've seen, a material can be called graphite but not exhibit the weight, sensitivity, and toughness that characterizes the best rods on the market today.

**Fiberglass:** This material has been used to produce rods since the 50's and has come a long way since then. Glass is noted for soft actions and toughness, and is used to build some great rods. Many anglers prefer glass rods for throwing crankbaits or other applications where a medium to slow action is required. Some rods are built with a combination of graphite and glass, enabling rod designers to produce some great actions.

IM6, IM7, and so forth are trade names for particular graphite produced by the Hexcel Corporation. These numbers are not industry standards or an indication of quality, especially since other companies use the designations to refer to graphite not made by Hexcel. At best, they allow you to compare the quality of the material used to build different rods by the same manufacturer. You can be confident that the IM7 rod would use better graphite than the IM6 rod if both are made by the same manufacturer. It's more difficult to say the same about rods from two different companies, since they could be made from material from completely different manufacturers.

**Modulus:** As stated above, modulus refers to the stiffness of the graphite, not the amount of material used or the number of graphite fibers incorporated into the sheets. Buying a rod based solely on the modulus rating is a mistake because other factors must be considered. For instance, you don't want the stiffest rod for light line techniques or cranking. In addition, other qualities must be incorporated in the graphite itself and the rod must be designed correctly to ensure the best performance and durability of the rod. The other components that go into a quality rod can also add significantly to the cost.

**Guides:** Most of the guides you will find on bass rods today feature a metal frame and a ceramic ring that the line glides on. This ring can vary greatly in price, and one single guide
on a spinning rod can cost in excess of $30 or as little as a couple of bucks. Silicon carbide, or SiC, is usually considered the best material today. It offers a super smooth surface for less friction on the line during the cast and the retrieve. Less friction means longer casts and less heat, and heat kills when it comes to fishing lines.

Alconite is another smooth material that is much less expensive than SiC. Hardloy, Hialoy, and aluminum oxide are other ceramic materials that are quite serviceable and are found on most rods on the market today. They are very inexpensive. Some of the newest guides feature Titanium wire. These guides will spring back into place even if they are bent flat. Standard stainless steel guides break instead of bending, necessitating expensive and annoying repairs. Some proprietary guides use a ring of stainless steel instead of ceramic. These rings are not nearly as smooth as the ceramic inserts but are very lightweight, reducing the overall weight of the rod.

A rod with more guides on it will generally cast better and cost more than the same rod with fewer guides. With more guides the rod will bend more consistently throughout its length, allowing it to utilize all the power for longer casts and fighting fish. The Fuji Concept Guide System is the best example of this development on rods today.

Cork: You need to have a comfortable and lightweight handle with sufficient grip, even when it’s wet, that will transmit the delicate vibrations of a big bass picking your worm, and cork fits the bill perfectly. A nice, new, fresh, clear, high quality cork grip is a beautiful thing! However, the quality of cork varies greatly along with the price. Most rod manufacturers base the grade of cork used in their rods on the overall cost of the rod; you will get the best cork with the most expensive rods.

Reel seats: The reel seat holds the reel on the rod. There isn't much variation in reel seats. Most anglers who don't require heavy tackle prefer graphite seats with a cutout that allows you to feel the blank. Surf anglers that need heavy tackle prefer metal alloy which is superior to graphite. The cheapest rods will use reel seats that don't have a plastic cushion inside the metal hoods that the feet of the reel fit into. These seats will often rust and stain your reel. They can bind up, too, making it difficult to remove your reel. Cheap rods, particularly those made offshore, will have cardboard spacers between the reel seat and the rod blank that will dampen vibration and can tear easily, especially when it gets wet, allowing the seat and the reel to rotate on the rod; not a good thing!

When you take all these factors into consideration it's easy to see why the best rods cost so much money.

In the case of a beginner this is probably more than you need to know about rods. However it does help you to understand the importance of choosing a rod that will serve the purpose for which it is intended.

My recommendation as was stated in the introduction of this manual is to select a surf rod
between 10' and 12' to start out. It doesn't have to be anything more than an inexpensive combo set found at any well stocked sporting goods retailer or Internet site.

Here's a summary of the rod characteristics that are ideal:

- Size 10'-12'
- Medium Action and Medium Heavy Power
- (Find the specs for the rod printed just above the handle)

**Reels**

There are two types of surf reels to consider. The first is the spinning reel and the other is referred to as a conventional reel (also known as bait casting reel). Surf anglers definitely have their absolute favorite style and brand.

As a beginner, if you don't have a lot of experience with conventional reels, start with a saltwater spinning reel. Spinning reels are much easier to use and result in a lot less problems for the newbie.

In choosing a reel, first consider line capacity. You should be thinking about using 20# to 30# test line. Look to have enough room to spool on 200 to 250 yards of line. Sufficient yardage is needed to reach the casting distances involved. Plus you need to have some line left over for a hard run by a strong fish.

You can get a spinning reel with a baitfeeder feature that has two drags. One drag is for fighting the fish and the other drag is set very light so a fish can run with your bait. It also will prevent a pull over.

There's a post you can read on my site about baitfeeder spinning reels [here](#).

Don't be too concerned about sustained drag ratings or gear ratio when you are just getting started. If the reel is rated to carry the capacity and strength of line you will be using, it should be suitable for your purpose. You should be able to find the rated specifications printed on the reel.

Reels are a lot like cars. You can go economy or elite. They both get the job done. Some will perform better and are better built. Price is a good guide for quality and performance. If you are just starting out there is no need to spend a lot of money. Get addicted to the sport first before you decide to go with something more expensive. It's a lot easier to justify the price.
My personal opinion of conventional reels is that they are only worth owning if you plan on needing one hell of a lot of power to land something bigger than 7'. If you are using 20# - 30# test line you will be able to land anything with a spinning reel that doesn't break your line.

Sorry for you guys that got to have conventional reels but that's the way it is.

**Hooks**

Hooks come in more sizes than you will ever need as a surf angler. Single number sizes range from size 1 to 32. One being largest and 32 being smallest. Numbered sizes followed by a “/” and a “0” range from 1/0 to 20/0. 1/0 being the smaller and 20/0 the largest. The complete size range from smallest to largest is from 32 to 20/0.

Use number #8 or #6 hooks for Kingfish, Pompano and Sand Perch. Hook sizes from #4 to #1 are for Snapper Bluefish, Croaker and smaller Sea Trout. Sizes 3/0, 5/0 and 6/0. (and up) are for the bigger fish like Red Drum and Strippers.

Size the hooks relative to your bait size and the fish you seek. With any kind of cut bait go with 3/0 and larger.

If you are using some kind of worm go with #8 or #6 hooks.

I strongly recommend the use of circle hooks. They set well and will hook the fish in the mouth area. The last thing you want to do is try to dig out a swallowed hook. Circle hooks are the hook to use for catch and release with the least harm to the fish.

Circle hooks are also required by regulation in the Gulf of Mexico.

**Line**

There are essentially two type of line used for surf fishing, monofilament line or braided line. Monofilament line of equal strength is thicker than braided line and has a certain amount of stretch. Whereas braided is thinner and virtually no stretch. Surf anglers are in both camps as far as their preference of one over the other.

If you need to get more line on your reel then go with braided line. Braided line will give you more than double the line capacity over monofilament and greater casting distances. The most popular braided line is Power Pro. Braided line is expensive. If price is a factor go with monofilament.
Get more information on PowerPro from this [post](#) at my site. There are two videos to watch also.

**Leaders**

Leaders are the section of line that attaches to the swivel and used to tie on lures, artificial bait and hooks. Leaders for general surf fishing range from 40# to 60# test. For fish with sharp teeth use 45# test wire.

**Shock Leader Rigging**

Shock leaders are a necessary requirement for surf fishing. The shock leader is used to absorb the force of the sinker weight during the cast. A 3oz or heavier sinker plus bait can put a lot of stress on the line during the cast. Without a shock leader the line would break at the swivel under the load of the cast. Shock leaders should be long enough to wrap five times around the spool and rated at 10# of test for each ounce of sinker weight used. The overall length should never exceed 20’.

**Swivels**

Swivels are necessary to keep the twist out of your line. Especially when using a spinning reel. They also provide the means to attach the line to your leader, lure or sinker. They come in many sizes. Snap swivels allow a quick way to attach and easily make a change to something else. For starting out I would recommend some #1’s and some #3’s. Size them to the intended tackle they will attach to.

Don't use another snap swivels other than [coast locks](#). Regular snap swivels can open up while trying to land a big fish. Coast locks will hold and also carry a test strength rating.

![Coast Lock Snap Swivel](#)

**Sinkers**

The most popular sinker used is the pyramid sinker. The pointed end digs into the sand and helps to hold the bottom. For rougher water conditions switch to spider sinkers or sputniks. These are designed with wire claws that grip better for stronger holding power.

Typical sizes used range from 3oz. to about 6oz. depending on surf conditions.
**De-hookers**

De-hookers are handy to have on hand. They easily and safely remove internal and external hooks with the least possible harm to the fish. They are available in different sizes based on the size of fish. Length of the shaft needs to be long enough to remove a swallowed hook and diameter of the loop small enough to fit into the fishes mouth. For most surf fishing a 16" will be suitable.

De-hookers are required by regulation in the Gulf of Mexico.

**Tackle Maintenance**

First rule of thumb, keep your reel out of the sand. Sand has the highest detrimental effect on reels. Second detrimental effect is saltwater. Saltwater reels are designed for surf fishing but are not impervious to salt water damage.

After a fishing trip the reel should be rinsed off with freshwater. Avoid spraying the reel to prevent driving salt into the moving parts. Wipe it down and dry it off. A good tip is to use some furniture polish or wax on the exterior. Occasionally it should be partially or fully disassembled, cleaned and lubricated depending on your mechanical ability to put it back together.

Inspect the guides on your rod for damage and repair as necessary. Replacing a line guide is not that difficult if you follow the proper procedure and do it right.

**Pros & Cons of Monofilament Line vs Braided Line**

There is a lot of controversy among anglers regarding the the use of monofilament line vs. braided line. Monofilament has been around for a long time. Braided line has come into the picture more recently. Because of the different characteristics between the two, some anglers have had problems switching to braided line from monofilament.

Monofilament has more stretch and requires a much more aggressive effort when setting the hook. Using the same effort with braided line will often rip the hook out of the fishes mouth. It's difficult to overcome the reflex action ingrained over time when a fish bites. Braided line has virtually no stretch.

Because braided line doesn't stretch it provides much greater sensitivity to feel a bite and of course as mentioned above, very little effort to set the hook.

Monofilament is thicker than braided line by a fair amount. Power Pro 50# test braided line has the approximate same diameter as 12# monofilament. This is a benefit for surf anglers who desire plenty of line capacity for long casts with left over line to fight a runner.

Braided line does not have a memory. It comes off the reel nice and straight. As opposed to monofilament which comes off the reel in loops. The loops drag on the guides of the rod as it comes off the reel. Greater casting distances can be achieved with braided line for this reason.

The down side of braided line is the extra expense over monofilament. Even with the greater
expense many more anglers find themselves switching over to braided setups.

**How To Make A Sand Spike**

A sand spike is used to place the rod in while rigging up or waiting for a bite. Unless you are fishing lures, a sand spike is a necessary piece of equipment. Even if you are using lures, why would you set your pole down on the sand to rig up. Sand is not good when it comes in contact with your reel.

You can certainly buy a sand spike. Why not make your own. All big box home centers or hardware stores stock PVC pipe. All you need is a piece of 2” PVC, a nut and a bolt long enough to go through the PVC. PVC usually comes in ten foot lengths but you can also buy a five foot piece.

Start with a five foot piece. Use any kind of saw and cut a sharp angle on one end. Drill a hole for the nut and bolt about 18” down from the top. The placement of the nut and bolt keeps the rod from going in too deep. Make sure that when the rod is placed in the spike that the reel doesn't rest on the top of the PVC.

Some beaches are more stony than sand. Depending on the beach makeup, you made need to dig the spike in. Place the spike in deep enough to prevent it from pulling over when you get a strike.
Add A Selection Of Top Producing Surf Lures

Lures For Daytime Use

Super Strike Little Neck poppers

This plug is well known to cast effortlessly getting fantastic distance and holds up to the toothiest of critters. What makes this popper stand out in the sinking versions is when retrieved slowly it will swim very much like a metal liped swimmer to entice even reluctant Striped Bass. This lure is regarded as one of the most productive poppers made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>S/F</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Oz.</th>
<th>Hook Size</th>
<th>Swivel lb. Test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PP4O</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>4-1/4&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP4W</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>4-1/4&quot;</td>
<td>1-1/2</td>
<td>1/0</td>
<td>230</td>
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<tr>
<td>PP5O</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5-1/4&quot;</td>
<td>1-1/2</td>
<td>2/0</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP5W</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>5-1/4&quot;</td>
<td>2-3/8</td>
<td>2/0</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP6O</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6&quot;</td>
<td>2-1/4</td>
<td>3/0</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP6W</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>6&quot;</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3/0</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F = Floating         S = Sinking

Leadheads with 4” plastic shads

Add a few 3/0 lead heads and hook 4” plastic shads to the lead head. Or buy them setup already together. Flat white is best, second best is white pearl. Works great for strippers. Lead heads will also catch Speckled Trout, Bluefish, Flounder, Pompano, Spanish Mackerel,
Gray Trout, Sea Mullet, and even large Croakers.

**At Sunset Use Charlie Graves Tins**

With their unique shapes, aggressive swimming action, they imitate a wide variety of bait fish that live along coastal beaches inlets and bays. These tins are available up to 4 oz. Replacement dressed white siwash hooks are also available in 3/0, 4/0 and 5/0 sizes. Deadly for Striped Bass Fishing!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>These lures are classified into three categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long and narrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shorter and broader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad and deep</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Transitioning into Early Darkness Use**

**The Danny Surface Swimmer**

The outstanding ability of this plug to attract big fish is due to the unique swimming action it creates. Unlike minnow type plugs that swim from the nose, the Danny pivots from a fulcrum in the center of its body. It has been said that this more closely resembles the larger bait that bigger fish prefer.
At Night Use

Little Neck Swimmers

This plug will dig-in fast, even in strong cross winds. It works well in calm water and holds in rough water.

Surf Fishing Carts

Some beaches allow vehicles to drive on the beach. If you can't do that you're probably going to want some kind of fishing cart to get all your gear down to the waters edge. Besides all your tackle you'll want to bring a cooler for fish or refreshments, something to keep your bait in, folding chairs and so on.

If you fish with a friend then there's all the gear they bring as well. The fishing cart in the photo above is a good compromise. It's not too big or too small and it's light enough to truck around. If you want to know more about this cart visit this post at my site.

If you plan to fish mostly alone, you can probably get by with a two wheel cart. I prefer a cart that doesn't have to be unloaded at the beach. It's so much more convenient to be able to access everything that way. If you want to move to another spot, it isn't necessary to pack it up. Just grab the handle and go. Packing and unpacking gets old fast.

Some surf anglers build their own. If your handy that's another option. Finding suitable large wide wheels for the sand can be a problem though. Otherwise, this might be the way to go. Most of the homemade carts are constructed with PVC pipe. PVC pipe is easy to work with and isn't damaged by the saltwater environment.
Lots of surf anglers make their own spider weights. If you have access to scrap residential/commercial electric wire and scrap lead used to balance tires, making your own spider weights will save the cost of buying them.

I've seen simple molds made from a piece of 2x4 with an 1-1/2" hole bored into it. Depending on the size of the weight they use single strands of #8 to # 12 copper romex wire with the plastic stripped off. If you have to buy the raw materials it probably isn't worth your time. Otherwise you might give it a try.

They all have their own particular methods. It doesn't take too much imagination to figure out once you see what a spider sinker looks like. Any method that embeds the wire in the melted lead will work. Look on-line for ideas or come up with your own version.
**Fish Finder Rig**

The fish finder rig is one of the most popular surf rigs used. The rig is set up so the sinker can slide on the line which allows the fish to pick up the bait and run without feeling the sinker. The sinker is attached to a swivel with a sleeve that allows it to slide on the main line.

These rigs can be purchased or made depending on your preference. To set one up slide the sinker sleeve on your line and tie on a swivel. Tie off a leadded hook to the swivel. Using a plastic bead between the sinker and the swivel will prevent the sinker sleeve from damaging the knot on the swivel.

**Fireball Rigs**
Fireball rigs are available in monofilament or wire. They are made with two hooks tied to a leader. One hook is at the bottom of the leader and the other is at the top. These rigs are made for bottom fishing and have small floats near the hooks to float the bait just out of reach of the crabs.

Fireball rigs are the most popular rig used for Bluefish. These rigs can be used for almost any fish found in the surf. Be sure to use the wire versions for bluefish.

**How to Select And Use Knots**

We could cover hundreds of knots in this section. However, if you can remember how to tie just a few you can deal with every situation needed for surf fishing.

**THE UNI LEADER KNOT**

The uni knot is used to join two lines together. Ex. tie a shock leader to the running line.

1) Tie a half hitch in the leader and thread the main line.

![Uni Knot Diagram]

2) Pull the hitch tight, then tie in a five turn Uni Knot.

![Five Turn Uni Knot Diagram]

3) Tighten the Uni Knot, pull the two halves of the leader knot together and trim.

![Tightened Uni Knot Diagram]

**The Albright knot**

The Albright knot is also used to join two lines together. Ex. tie a shock leader to the running line.

1) Form a loop in one of the tag ends. Insert the other tag end through loop from the top.

![Albright Knot Diagram]
2) Wrap the first turn and continue wrapping toward the round end of the loop. Take at least 10 turns around all three strands

3) Bring the end back through the loop out the same direction as it came in.

4) Snug down the wraps towards the end of the loop leaving the loop a little loose.

5) Tighten the knot in by pulling the loop up inside the wraps towards the opposite end.

6) Trim the tag ends.

**The Palomar Knot**

This is an easy knot to tie it is used to tie off hooks, lures and other terminal tackle.

1) Make a loop about 4″ long and pass loop through eye.
2) Let hook hang loose and tie overhand knot with the loop.

3) Pass the loop over the hook or whatever you are tying off.

4. Snug the knot down and tighten in place. Clip off the excess leaving a short length about 1/8".
Chapter V  What Do You Fish For?

Using Fish Reports

Fish reports are an excellent way to follow the action in your area. You can learn a lot quickly and be better prepared when you arrive at the beach. Knowing what tackle and rigs to bring saves a lot of time getting setup at the beach. When you hit the beach you can have the bait needed or lures ready and start fishing.

Use The Local Bait and Tackle Shop for Reports

What you fish for will vary with your locality, time of year, weather and surf conditions. One of the best ways to find out what kind of fish to go after is to visit the local bait and tackle shop.

Attendants at the shop, talk to all the local fisherman and have a pretty good idea what kind of action you can expect. Most shops will post times for high and low tide. They'll will usually post what fish are being taken and the best bait used.

If you're not familiar with the particular beach you will be targeting, spend a few minutes talking with the shop attendant to find out whether the fish are moving or hanging in a particular zone.

Once you have a general idea where to start and what to go after you can apply the knowledge gained here to decide what tactics to use.

If you will be visiting an area you know nothing about, get the phone number of the tackle shop close to the where you will be fishing. They'll be more than happy to help you out.

Using the Internet for Reports

The Internet is another good place to get fish reports. Several sites post reports by the local fisherman. It's a good place to start before visiting the local bait and tackle shop. It will give you a better idea of what questions to ask once you get to the shop.

Not all of the information on the net will be up to date. You will have to make a judgment call on the reliability depending on when the reports came in and how much time has past by the time you found it. In any case it will give you some idea what's happening in your location.

As you get into the sport of surf fishing over time you will find a few favorite forums to participate in that share lots of worthwhile information. Forums come in many different varieties and topics. After visiting a few you will probably find one that has discussions on the action in your area. It's a good place to make new friends and further your knowledge of the sport.

Websites come and go here's two website that at the time of this writing do publish fishing reports:
You can also search on “fishing reports” to zero in on those sites that provide saltwater and surf reports.

Between on-line fishing reports, Internet forums and local Bait & tackle shops you should be able to isolate the best times and fish to target once you get to the surf.
Chapter VI  How Do You Find Them?

Areas Of The Surf That Hold Fish

The action of wind, waves and tides is constantly changing the shape and features of the ocean bottom. The bottom changes to form sandbars, points, troughs, bowls and other features. The underwater terrain will determine where bait fish and predators congregate. Learning to identify these formations in the bottom structure is the key to locating likely areas to target fish.

What You Need To Know About Sandbars and Troughs (Guts)

When observing the ocean from the beach most would assume that the bottom is flat. As the wind, weather and currents change the bottom of the ocean, sandbars and troughs are formed. Troughs are the deeper areas between the sandbars and also referred to as guts or sloughs. As the ocean bottom is changing the location of fish change with it. The changes in the water bottom change where fish hang and travel searching for food.

The sandbars will also have breaks that form in them known as cuts or rips. The fish use the breaks to move between the sandbars into the troughs. During changes in the tide, as it goes out, bait fish wash through the breaks where predators wait for meal.

Fish are found in the troughs and around the breaks in the sandbar as well as other forms of structure along the surf line. These are some of the locations that you will learn to target. In the sections that follow. You will learn to identify areas in the surf that are likely to hold fish.

Target The Second or Third Sandbar Gut or Not

Depending on the area where you will be fishing there will be one to three sandbars within casting distance. At different times certain species will be found anywhere between the beach and the first sandbar or in the troughs beyond the sandbars. For the most part expect to find the best fishing beyond the first sandbar but there are certain times when you will also find good action in the shallows.

As a general rule bigger fish are in the deeper troughs. You'll need to use a little trial and error along with other knowledge you acquire to find out. To those that don't know how to read the surf all the water looks the same. Once you learn to read the surf in later chapters you will be able to target these areas for the best productivity.

Sandbar Cuts (Rips) Provide Excellent Fishing Opportunities

Sandbar rips can be very productive. As the tide is moving out the water behind the sandbar can't get out fast enough and is forced through the rips. The water forcibly sucks the bait fish
and other food sources with it. The rips trigger feeding opportunities where the fish wait in ambush.

Observing the water line and knowing what to look isn't that difficult. Sometimes the rips can be seen easier at low tide. At high tide the action of the waves and water color reveal their location.

Among all the other forms of bottom structure, a rip can often be the most productive.

**Finding Cuts and Breaks in Sandbars Known as Suck-outs**

Observe the waves and surf line for several minutes. Pay attention to the waves as they break. There will be some sections in the crest that are flat where the wave doesn't break and it reoccurs in the same spots. Also look for color changes in the water and the movement against the wave direction. These are the signs that indicate where the rip is.

There are several ways to fish a rip once you can locate it. Fishing a rip is covered in the next chapter.

**Keys To Success – Tide, Temperature, Wind Direction & Underwater Terrain**

Putting it all together. The keys to consistently catching fish in the surf is understanding the factors that that lead to successful results.

The tide cycles from high to low approximately every six hours. Tidal movement of the water creates the currents that the fish follow searching for food. The food supply moves through the currents and carries the scent of their food supply.

Between high and low tide there is a period of time for about an hour where the water is more or less still. Little activity occurs during this period. Low tide is a difficult time to fish at the beach due to the water depth depending on the beach. High tide is the best because the fish are in water within casting distance. This is the reason that the two hour period on each side of high tide is the best time for surf fishing.

The on shore wind works to push the activity towards the shore. As long as the wind isn't too rough it helps to move the fish and their food supply with the action of the waves. An on shore wind is always preferred to an off shore wind.

Underwater terrain is the other most significant factor that determines where the fish will be. The underwater terrain is the structure that that draws the fish to certain areas.

Successful results is achieved by using these factors to determine the the time and place to fish. You can catch fish at other times but these factor will provide optimum results.
Weather Changes And Surf Fish Patterns

Use the NOAA weather station in your area to follow weather patterns and wind direction. The weather station will provide you with average wind velocity, wind direction, gust velocity, wave height, swell height, air temperature, water temperature barometric pressure and several other details.

The weather stations will provide this information for every hour for the last 24 hours. What the wind has been doing over the last 24 hours is more important than the current hour. If the wind has been blowing on shore, you want to know how long it has been in that direction. How high were the waves. In other words you are trying to get a picture of what the weather conditions were and how it might be effected the fishing.

If the surf has been calm and the wind and waves are starting to come up this is a great time to be out there. As long as conditions aren't too rough, look for good opportunities to catch fish.

Here's a link to the NOAA coastal weather stations. [www.ndbc.noaa.gov](http://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/) There lot of useful information to get through at this site. One of the cool features is a service they provide called “Dial A Buoy”. You can use your cell phone to call an 800 number then you enter the five digit station identifier to listen to the reports. You can also get the forecasts from this service.

If you are really into the weather you can even get RSS feeds from any station. How cool is that? Get Instructions at the site to learn how to set it up the RSS feeds.

Watch the weather forecasts for in coming cold fronts. The cold fronts disrupt the fish patterns and have an overall negative effect on fishing. After a front comes through it can take several days for the fish to return to their regular patterns again.

Feeding Birds Can Help Locate Fish

If gulls and terns are diving over the water you can be sure the game fish are below driving the bait to the surface.

If the birds are within casting distance try throwing a plug into the activity. Chances are you'll get a strike. If you can't reach them with a cast wait awhile. Often times the bait fish will move in closer where you can then reach them.

Target The Best Spots On Any Beach For The Best Results

When planning a time to fish try to see the beach at low tide before you go out. At low tide you will be able to get a better idea of the bottom formations when you return at high tide to fish.

For the purpose of locating productive spots to fish, any beach can be broken down into four primary formations. The four types of sand structure are Points, Holes, Troughs and Sand Bars.

**Points**

Points are sections of the beach that jut out to form a point or a peninsula shape. It may look
like just a bend in the shoreline. They can be large or small.

If other conditions are right fish will hang around the point and to the sides of the point in the open water areas. Fish the pocket areas around the point.

**Holes**

Holes are deeper areas formed in the bottom surrounded on one or more sides of shallower bottom. They can be wide and deep or smaller less noticeable areas. As the shape of the shoreline moves in and out these holes are formed into the bottom. Look for the color changes in the water to spot them easier. Darker water is deeper water.

Fish the edges as the color changes into the darker water. Depending on the size and shape, if there is a defined center fish the center also.

**Troughs**

Troughs are deep water areas between the beach and the first sandbar or the deep water between the sandbars. The sandbars run parallel to the beach. Think of the troughs as the highways the fish use to hunt food.

Some beaches may not have any sand bars after a storm. Usually you will find from one to three sandbars progressively further out from the beach.

To locate the sandbars, observe the waves. The wave will crest as they go over the sand bar. If the water is deeper the wave may only swell as it goes over the sandbar. By observing the wave action and the color changes in the water you should be able to get a good idea where the troughs are located. Look for consistent repeat action of the waves over certain areas.

It's important to recognize repeating wave act because sometimes the wind will have tendency to push the wave over causing it to crest prematurely.

Fish the edges of the trough where the water transitions into a darker color. Fish prefer the steeper edges which can occur at the front or back of the trough.

**Sandbars**

Sandbars are the peaks in the bottom that run parallel to the shoreline like a mini mountain range under water. Sandbars are continuous. They will have cuts through them where rips are formed. Locate the sandbars as described above in the troughs section. After you determine how the sandbar runs you will be looking to locate the cuts and rips through the sandbar.

The fish will be waiting around the cut for the food that washes through with the current. There are three areas of a cut to fish. Fish in the current of both back sides as well as the center of the cut. You can also try in front of the cut but it may not be as productive.

**Finding the Fish**

Finding the fish is a systematic process. Read the beach in terms of the four bottom structure formations. If you think of the under water structure in these terms it becomes much easier to read the bottom for productive areas to fish. Locate the productive formations and systematically fish them to locate fish. Once you locate the the type of bottom structure that holds fish you can move along the beach, fishing the same type of structure and continue catching fish.
Chapter VII  How Do You Fish For Them?

Surf Casting Techniques

Learning to cast takes a little bit of practice, especially before you are able to get good distance and direction. One of the most common problems is not releasing the cast at the proper time. Not releasing the cast at the proper time results in poor distance and bad direction.

There are a few different types of casts used for surf casting. Without attaching any specific names they are depicted by the following:

1. The casting tackle is launched from a position resting on the ground behind the angler.
2. The casting tackle is launched from a suspended position behind the angler.
3. The casting tackle is swung back & forth behind the angler to gain momentum before launching. (This technique is known as the pendulum cast)

Simple Guidelines For Developing Your Casting Technique

To execute a cast the rod is gripped with the right hand in the upper position at the reel (for right handers) and the left hand at the lowest position of the rod. If you are using a spinning reel, open the bail and hold the line with your index finger. If you are using a conventional reel use your thumb on the spool to hold the line.

Stand sideways to the target direction with the left foot forward and the feet comfortable apart. Keeping the feet firmly planted, turn the body while bringing the rod and tackle back away from the direction of the cast.

Choose one of the three styles of casting listed above and begin to launch the tackle in an arch towards the target. Use the upper hand to push and the lower hand to pull as you swing the tackle out for the cast. Release the line at the proper moment to achieve the distance and direction desired.

That's all there is to it except for practice to develop your style.

Some Casting Tips

A lot of force is used to launch a cast. To protect your finger when using a spinning reel wear a glove or wrap some tape around the index finger. Or use a Breakaway Cannon.

When learning to cast focus on proper release and direction before going for distance. As you develop your coordination then gradually increase the distances of your cast.

The pendulum cast has the greatest potential for distance. If you choose to practice this technique, swing the tackle back and forth in a direction parallel to the shoreline and launch the cast as the pendulum motion is about to swing in the direction of the cast.

A lot of power goes into a cast. Use a shock leader to prevent the tackle from breaking off at the end of the main line.
To prevent the bait from flying off the end of the hook during a power cast use a breakaway clip or arrange the rig with a spider sinker. With either setup place the hook on the clip or spider leg before casting. The hook will automatically release when it hits the water but the bait will stay on.

All About Surf Fishing Baits

There are many natural baits that can be used to catch fish from the surf. These are the most popular baits that are used.

Shrimp

You can't really go wrong with shrimp. Shrimp will always catch some type of fish in the surf. You can use live or dead shrimp and you can fish them with a jig or on the bottom with a pyramid sinker. With dead shrimp, cut the tail and head off and just use the meat portion of the shrimp. This seems to get more bites.

Sand Fleas

Sand fleas are the top bait among some surf anglers. The sand flea is not actually a crab, but it looks like a small crab and has many similarities. They can be caught all along the beach in the sand. As the wave recedes from the beach, look for v-shaped ripples in the sand. These are sand fleas that have dug into the sand. Dig them up by hand or with a sand flea rake. Pick up your sand fleas and put them into a container with some moist sand. If you submerge sand fleas in water, they will drown. Keep the container covered in hot weather. A damp cloth will work just fine. Fish the sand fleas with a bottom rig. Sand fleas will catch a variety of species such as Pompano, Whiting, Blackfish, Redfish, striped bass, black drum, croakers and others.

Bloodworms

Bloodworms have a pinkish color as their pale skin allows their red body fluids to show through. They can be found on the bottoms of shallow marine waters. Bloodworms are poor swimmers, but they are very good at burrowing into the sand and silt bottoms. Bloodworms work well for Bluefish, Sea Trout, Striped Bass, Whiting, Flounder, Porgy and others.

Clam Worms

Clam worms, often referred to as ragworms or sandworms, are reddish brown with 4 eyes, 2 sensory feelers and 8 tentacles. You can find clam worms at bait and tackle shops. Some of the species that will eat a clam worm are flounder, sea trout, blackfish, striped bass, porgy, whiting, croakers, rockfish and surf perch.

Crabs

Crabs can be very effective for many different fish. Most anglers go catch their own crabs for
bait. Catch them with a fishing line and a fresh piece of chicken or even a chicken bone. Drop your chicken down and you will have no problem catching plenty of bait. Shallow bays, creeks, canals and marshes are the best places to find crabs. A whole hard-shell crab will work well for Tarpon and Black drum. Soft-shell crabs are great for Tarpon, Black Drum, Snook, Redfish and Blackfish. Pieces of crab will work for many smaller fish as well.

**Clams**

Clams are great baits for surf fishing. Some anglers don’t like using them because it’s tough to keep them on the hook. If you are using fresh clams, the meat will stay on the hook better. Once clams die, the meat deteriorates quickly and it will be hard to keep the bait on the hook. Frozen clams can be effective, but the fresh clams do a better job of staying on the hook. Clams will catch many species including Flounder, Sea Trout, Blackfish, Striped Bass, Porgy, Whiting, Rockfish and Surf Perch.

**Mullet**

Mullet are a very popular bait used in surf fishing, especially from the Carolinas down to Florida and into the Gulf of Mexico. Many anglers use cast nets to catch mullet for bait. They can be caught near shore or inshore. Mullet can also be purchased at local bait and tackle shops and they work well for a variety of fish such as Redfish, Snook, Sea Trout, Striped Bass, Bluefish and Tarpon. Most smaller fish can be caught with cut pieces of mullet.

**Menhaden**

Menhaden are common among surf anglers on the Atlantic and in the Gulf of Mexico. Bait and tackle shops sell fresh and frozen menhaden. Live menhaden are great baits for Striped Bass and Bluefish. Dead menhaden works for many species such as Striped Bass, Bluefish, Redfish and Sea Trout.

**Eels**

Eels are hated by most fishermen. They can be a mess and they are hard to handle. However, eels can be an incredible bait, especially for targeting big fish. Eels in the 8 to 16 inch range seem to work best for bait, although fishermen have success with much larger eels. On the east coast, eels are a very popular bait for Striped Bass.

**Squid**

Squid are very effective for fishing in the surf. You can buy squid fresh or frozen at bait shops and fish markets. Using the whole squid will work for Striped Bass, Bluefish and Redfish. For most other species, a strip of squid will work just fine.
How To Prepare Cut Bait

Preparing Menhaden/Bunker/Mullet bottom fishing Baits for Red Drum, Redfish, Striper, Cobia, Sharks, etc.

Keep the bait in a sealed bag of some type for protection from water and to help keep it fresh longer.

Find the "firmest" bait you can find and then check the gills for bright redness, clear eyes don't always tell the true story.

First, no scaling is necessary. The less you do to it the better. Clear the hook point of any scales it might pick up as you bait it and then flick off any scales that might be interfering with the hook or hanging off the edges of the steak. A large, very sharp knife is also a must. A serrated knife is best for the job.

This diagram is for a fairly large Menhaden as is the head baiting method shown. You won't get this many baits out of a 8" fish. A smaller head can be baited through the eyes without obstructing the hook setting abilities but it wouldn't be recommended on larger heads. You just want enough of the hook in the head or steak to keep it from coming off easily, no more.

The first thing I do is whack off the head. If going more for distance and not using heads make a gill cut first, that's where you'll end up with a little of the gills intact on that 1st steak [between "cut 1" and "cut 3" above.

Next is to whack the stomach off in one fell swoop. Menhaden bellies make fine strip baits for Flounder, Trout, Blues, Sea Mullet, Toads, etc. No need to cut the stomach flaps off.

The first steak resulting from "cut 3" will look similar to the hooked steak shown, No Flaps hanging down and no stomach holes to aid the current in pulling your bait down the beach!

Follow the rest of the “cuts” in sequence. Don't let the cut bait back sit in water. Never let any of the fish bait ever sit in water. On ice is fine but keep the water drained off.

Larger size Mullet can be prepared similarly except leave the whole head on with these.

With Finger Mullet make a single angled cut from about the top of “cut 5” behind the dorsal down to the bottom of “cut 1” just behind the gill plate and use only that head and dorsal section for bait.
Cut up only what you need for the next hour or so, no need to cut up more than will fit in your bait box. Plus, it will start going bad anyway. Store the rest whole and covered with ice until you need it. If bait is scarce and what you have begins to deteriorate, removing the heads and stomach sections can help delay the spoiling process. Rinsing the slime off in seawater or an icy salt brine when you first get them can also help delay the spoilage.

**How To Use a Cast Net To Catch Bait Fish**

Cast Nets are a great way to get bait fish. Learning to throw a cast net takes a little practice but it isn't too hard to learn. Cast nets are available in a variety of sizes starting at around five foot and going up to twelve feet. Depending on the local fishing regulations the cast net size and use may be regulated.

The best way to learn is by watching a video or from an instructor. It's practically impossible to learn from a set of written instructions.

There are lot of instructional videos on You Tube. Here's a link to one of the easier methods for one of the smaller size nets.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTtGWcpf88g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTtGWcpf88g)

Cast nets can be thrown in the surf or just about anywhere the water isn't too deep. After throwing the net, allow enough time for the net to reach the bottom. Then slowly draw the net in so the weights stay on the bottom until the net is fully closed. Bring the net in and empty the net of the bait collected.

The net will last longer if you clean it after each use. The salt and sun will dry the net out and eventually deteriorate the netting. You can keep it in good shape if it is cleaned then soaked in a little fabric softener and dried before storing it.

**Recommendations For Freezing Bait**

When fresh bait isn't readily available, keeping frozen bait on hand is the next best alternative. Here's a way to preserve the quality for future use of the soon to be frozen bait.

Soak it overnight in a brine solution of two pounds of salt to a five gallon bucket of sea water, well iced down. Freeze it the next day in Ziplock freezer bags. If you put 2 to 3 pounds of bait in each bag it makes an easy to use size for future trips. Using this method to freeze your bait will be superior to most store-bought frozen bait.

**Using Light Tackle For Surf Spinning**

Some surf anglers like to fish with light tackle. By light tackle I am referring to 10# or 12# test on a 7' to 8' salt water rod and reel similar to what you might use for bass fishing.

There are a lot of disadvantages to using light tackle in the surf zone. One big disadvantage is the limited casting distance. You will be limited to those fish that are in close. Bait and lure size will also be limited to smaller choices.

It can present a greater challenge to land a trophy size fish on light tackle but the chances of loosing more fish is also greater. Light tackle wouldn't be recommended for those just starting
Casting a heavy surf rod all day can be tiring. If you have thoughts of trying light tackle. Bring a light tackle setup along with your regular surf gear. Cast the surf rod out with some live bait and while waiting for a strike you can cast out some plugs with the light gear.

Under the right conditions this could be a lot of fun. Compared to the miles of beach access where regular surf gear is required there will be less opportunities for light tackle.

**Best Productive Surf Lures**

You don't need to become a tackle junkie always adding something that caught your eye at the tackle shop. The best productive surf lures are the ones that work for you. Keep it down to a few select choices of a half dozen or so.

**Surface Plugs**

Surface plugs are the most exciting lures to use. Actually getting to see a fish strike really gets the blood flowing. Little Neck Poppers are great surface plugs to use.

The secret to using any lure is to make it look alive. If you want to improve your catch rate and size practice your retrieval techniques. When schools of fish are feeding aggressively they will attack anything. It won't require much skill. Otherwise it is necessary to figure out what interests them.

Try different retrieval methods until you get a strike. Some species like a faster retrieval and other prefer slower movement. You won't find out unless you experiment a little. Keep the plug moving regardless of the retrieval speed. If the lure stops moving it may give the fish a chance to determine it isn't real and lose interest. Every few seconds twitch it a little to imitate an injured bait.

Once you figure out what they like you can up size the lure and go for some of the bigger feeders.

Surface lures are particularly effective when fished through a cut in the sandbar and where birds are feeding on the surface.

When fishing deeper water don't let the depth of the water deter you from trying surface plugs. Surface lures draw a lot of attention because of the sound and disturbance they create. Avoid surface lures in rougher choppy surf conditions.

**Spoons**

It's never the wrong time of the year to fish with spoons. Spoons will work well on a lot of different fish. If you're not sure what's out there try a spoon. The same thing about speed that applies to surface lures also applies to spoons. Experiment with the speed of retrieval until you find out what they're interested in. If the retrieval is too slow the spoon will lose its action.

It's not a good idea to attach any other live or artificial bait to a spoon. It will lose the action it was designed to produce.

Spoons can be fished at any level in the water column. You can fish a spoon anywhere from
near the surface to the bottom. Spoons can be very effective for locating fish because of this reason. Experiment with different depths to locate the fish. Try several retrievals at various depths. Start near the surface. As soon as the spoon hits the water start retrieval. If unsuccessful start a new series of casts counting at one second intervals before retrieving. When you get a strike continue fishing that depth by counting the number of seconds before starting the retrieval.

In the surf you need to size the spoon according to the distance you need to cast. Don't be too concerned about the size of the spoon but remember bigger spoons attract bigger fish.

**Swimmers**

Super Strike Little Neck Swimmers are also great year round lures. These are very popular with surf anglers. The newest models now come with built in rattles. Keep a few of these in your box. They work well at night but can also be effective at other times. Fish these anywhere in the surf especially in the cuts through a sandbar.

**Lead Heads and Plastic Shads**

Lead heads setup with plastic shads are good for a variety of fish. Allow them to sink to the bottom before retrieval. They can be worked at different speeds from slow to fast while bouncing along the bottom. Fish the troughs and sandbar cuts. Around dawn is the best time to use them.

**Artificial Bait**

DOA shrimp are great to use around shallow points and flats or free lined with an out going tide. The DOA Bait Buster has become one of the staple artificial baits among surf anglers. If the surf is rough, use a deep runner Bait Buster. Cast out the lure beyond the breaking waves and retrieve it through the waves. It will look exactly like a bait fish to the hungry predator. If the surf is calm use the shallow running Bait Buster and just cast it out and start a steady retrieve. Work the beach looking for holes and sandbar cuts.

**Fishing Shallow Points & Flats In The Surf**

Shallow points and flats can be productive spots to get some action. At low tide look for the sandy pointed areas along the beach. At high tide you'll be fishing in two or three feet of water. Fish out from the point and both sides with live bait, lures or artificials.

This a good place to use DOA shrimp which can be too light for longer casts. On points that go out farther you can walk out on the point and cast to all the sides.
Chapter VIII  Handling Fish After Their Caught

Catch And Release Practices

Teeth, fins and gill plates all represent potential danger when handling surf fish and removing hooks. Not to mention the hooks themselves.

Whether you practice catch and release or not you should be using circle hooks whenever possible. Circle hooks help to prevent the fish from swallowing the hook. It helps to save the fish and makes it easier for you to remove the hook since it will likely be hooked in the mouth.

Use the action of the waves to assist in bringing the fish up to the edge of the beach. Raise the rod and move forward so that you can grab the line as it goes slack. While holding the line keep it taunt and place the rod back in the sand spike or lean it against your body. Follow the line down to the leader with your hand. Use a pair of gloves to hold the fish against the sand and remove the hook with a pair of pliers or de-hooker. If you are using a de-hooker it may be necessary to hold the fish down with your knee so you can use one hand on the leader and the other on the de-hooker to get the hook out.

Once the hook is out return the fish to the surf in water deep enough for it to swim off. Move the fish gently back and forth until it's ready to swim off.

Keeping Some Of Your Catch For The Table

Catch and release is a good practice but some of the keepers will likely be kept for the table. Even if the area you fish has a cleaning station you will need to bring a cooler of ice along to keep the catch fresh until you get home. Most cleaning stations aren't very sanitary anyway.

Bring two coolers one with plenty of ice and your drinks and the other empty. If you decide to keep some of your catch Use the empty cooler and ice the fish down from the drink cooler. Keep the water drained off and don't let the fish lay in the water.

Plan ahead with some idea of what you might want to keep so you have enough space and ice on hand to do the job.

If the fishing is exceptionally good don't start filling the cooler right away. Wait until you fished awhile before filling the cooler. Your catch will be fresher if you can minimize the time in the cooler until you are able to clean the fish.

If you decide to keep some of your catch, check out the recipes in Chapter X.
Chapter IX  Properly Cleaning Fish For The Dinner Table

Fish Cleaning Gear – Skinning And Scaling Tools

To do a good job cleaning your catch you need a few good tools. A sharp fillet knife, scaler, and pliers. Rubber gloves with grippers are handy too.

A scaler isn't necessary unless you plan to keep the skin on. Filleted fish are best because they have no skin or bones.

Fillet knives are available in different sizes or in electric models. You decide which is better. A regular fillet knife is better to feel the bones if you get to close but it takes a little more work. An electric fillet knife cuts easier and faster but it's harder to tell if you are getting too close to the bone. The last thing you want is bones in your fillets. Electric fillet models can be cordless or plug in styles. If you don't plan on filleting your fish, scaling and skinning tools can be purchased at your favorite tackle shop or on-line.

The Fish Cleaning Process

A properly filleted fish steak has no bones and no skin with the least amount meat left behind. Use a sharp fillet knife or an electric fillet knife. Your choice. The method described here works better with a regular fillet knife. This method will remove the most amount of meat without the necessity of removing the head, tail or gutting the fish. It's also not as messy.

1.) Begin by making an incision along each side of the backbone from just behind the head to the tail. Leave the head and tail intact.

2.) Make a second cut down into the meat behind the head and gills on both sides but do not cut the head off.

3.) Start at the top of the head and begin to cut the meat away from the rib bones towards the tail. You should be able to feel and see the bones as you cut away the meat. Lay the meat removed skin side down. Do this on both sides. Discard the remains.

4.) Start at the tail with the skin side down on a cutting board and carefully cut the skin away from the meat working away from yourself. You should end up with two nice fillets with very little meat left on the discarded carcass.

This is the cleanest method of filleting a fish and removing as much meat as possible without any bones.
Chapter X  From Surf To Plate

Favorite Recipes

Catching fish in the surf is an exciting experience. Another satisfying experience is eating them. Here's a selection of some great favorite recipes for some of the fish you decide to bring home.

Glazed Sea Bass With Ginger Butter Sauce

Ingredients For sauce:
1 cup white wine
1/3 cup chopped shallots
1/3 cup thinly sliced fresh ginger
1/2 cup whipping cream

Ingredients For fish:
6 tablespoons soy sauce
3 tablespoons honey
3 teaspoons rice vinegar
1 1/2 tablespoons cold water
1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch
4 sea bass fillets
4 tablespoons chilled butter, cut into small pieces

Prepare The Sauce:
Combine wine, shallots and ginger in heavy small saucepan over high heat. Boil until liquid is reduced to 1/4 cup, about 5 minutes. Add cream and boil until liquid is reduced by half, about 3 minutes. Remove from heat.

Prepare The Fish:
Mix soy sauce, honey and rice vinegar in another heavy small saucepan. Mix water and cornstarch in small bowl until smooth. Add to soy sauce mixture. Stir mixture over medium heat until glaze boils and thickens slightly, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Cool glaze to room temperature.

**Grilled Striped Bass with Garlic and Basil**

2 pounds striped bass fillet
3 tablespoons oil
Juice of 1 lemon (fresh)
4-6 tablespoons butter
4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 tablespoons basil, finely chopped
Dash of cayenne pepper

Marinate the fish in the oil and lemon juice for at least 30 minutes before grilling. Grill for 10-15 minutes, turning once. The length of time depends upon the thickness of the fillet.

Heat the butter in a saucepan and stew the garlic for about 3 minutes, stirring frequently. Do not let it brown. Add the basil and a dash of cayenne pepper. Remove the pan from the heat.

Either pour the garlic butter over the top of the fish just before serving, or serve it in a sauce boat on the side. (Serves 4)

**Redfish Fillets In Wine Sauce**

(Also good for Cobia and Snapper)
6 - 8 oz. fish Fillets
1 cup butter (not margarine)
2 Tbsp. minced garlic
1 large white onion
1 bunch green onions
1 cup chopped parsley
1 1/2 cups white wine
2 lemons
Flour, salt, pepper, oil
Season and flour Fillets well. Pan fry Fillets until lightly brown - not well done. Remove from pan and set aside on paper towels. Remove oil from frying pan and saute all chopped seasonings and garlic in butter until tender. Add wine and stir well for 3 minutes. Remove from heat and add fish Fillets to sauce. Let simmer until all Fillets are cooked. Sprinkle with lemon juice before serving and garnish with fresh parsley.

**Honey Grilled Bluefish**

6 - 6 oz. bluefish fillets or steaks  
1/2 cup soy sauce  
2 tbs. honey  
2 tbs. Dijon style mustard  
1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce  
1/2 tsp. hot pepper sauce  
1/4 tsp. chopped parsley

**Preparation:**  
Marinate fish in soy sauce in a glass dish for 2 to 3 hours. Combine remaining ingredients. Remove fish from soy & brush liberally with honey mixture.  
**Grill:**  
Preheat grill. Place fish, down on heavy foil or metal pan with the grill rack about 4 inches from hot coals, 10 minutes per inch of thickness.  
(Grill cover partly closed is best.)

**Pompano with Tropical Barbecue Glaze**

**Ingredients:**  
1 cup mango nectar  
1/4 cup apricot preserves  
2 teaspoons grated lime rind  
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice  
3 tablespoons honey  
2 teaspoons minced peeled fresh ginger  
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and finely chopped
3/4 teaspoon salt, divided
1 1/2 pounds pompano
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
Cooking spray

Preparation:
Prepare grill or broiler. Combine first 9 ingredients and 1/4 teaspoon salt in a small saucepan; bring to a boil. Reduce heat, and simmer 18 minutes or until thick, stirring often.
Sprinkle fish with 1/2 teaspoon salt and pepper; place on grill rack or broiler pan coated with cooking spray, skin side up. Cook 5 minutes. Turn fish; brush with sauce. Cook 4 minutes or until fish flakes.

Red Snapper with Lime-Ginger Butter

Prep and Cook Time: 18 minutes

Ingredients:
5 tablespoons butter, cut into small pieces
1 tablespoon lime juice
3 cloves garlic
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1/2 teaspoon hot pepper sauce
Salt
Black pepper
6 Red Snapper fillets (about 1-1/2 pounds)

Preparation:
Preheat broiler. Combine butter, lime juice, garlic, ginger, pepper sauce, salt and pepper to taste in food processor; process until smooth paste forms.
Broil red snapper 4 to 5 inches from heat 5 minutes. Turn fillets over and broil 4 minutes.
Place about 1 tablespoon reserved butter mixture on top of each fillet; broil 45 seconds. Serve immediately.
Serving Suggestion: For a special touch, serve fish with rice and garnish with fresh lime slices
and chives.
Makes 6 servings.

**Weakfish Delight**

2lbs. Weakfish
4 medium tomatoes sliced about 1/4"
3 Green peppers sliced
3 medium onions sliced
garlic powder to taste
fresh ground pepper to taste
McCormick Old Bay Seasoning to taste
Italian dressing

Preparation:
In a big bowl, combine all the ingredients and marinate them for ½ hour.
In the meantime fire up the BBQ and make sure its hot before you put the fish on. Wrap fillets and vegetables in foil packages and seal it tight. Cook for about 10 minutes or until done, turning once.
Serves 4

**Shark Steaks**

Ingredients:
1/2 cup soy sauce
1/2 cup orange juice
1/4 cup catchup
1/4 cup fresh parsley, Chopped
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1/3 tablespoon ground pepper
2 garlic cloves, minced
6 shark steaks
Directions:
Combine soy sauce, orange juice, catsup, chopped parsley, lemon juice, pepper, and minced garlic in a Ziplock bag. Squish to mix well. Add fish, seal and marinate in refrigerator for 2 hours.

Remove fish from marinade, re-serving marinade. Pat dry with a paper towel and apply a good layer of vegetable or olive oil to prevent sticking on the grill.

Preheat grill so grill rack is screaming hot. Place fish over hot coals or gas accordingly 6 minutes on each side or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork, basting frequently with marinade.

Allow to rest a few minutes before serving.

**Spanish Mackerel Heavenly Broiled**

2 pounds of Spanish Mackerel fillets
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 butter, softened
3 tablespoons mayonnaise or salad dressing
3 tablespoons chopped green onions
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon hot pepper sauce

Place fillets in a single layer on a well-oiled broiler pan. Brush fillets with lemon juice and let stand in refrigerator for 10 minutes. Combine remaining ingredients and set aside. Broil fillets about 4 inches from source of heat for 6 to 8 minutes or until fish flakes easily. Remove from heat and spread with cheese mixture. Broil 2 to 3 minutes or until lightly browned.

Serves 6

**Grilled Whitefish in Foil Recipe**

Ingredients:
4 firm whitefish fillets (about 6 ounces each)
1 can (8 ounces) tomato stew
1/3 cup spicy steak sauce
1 clove garlic, minced
1/2 onion, cut into thinly sliced rings
16-18 baby carrots, cut into matchsticks
4 (12 x 12-inch) square foils

Preparation:
In small bowl combine stewed tomatoes, steak sauce and garlic. Place each fillet in center of 1 of 4 squares of foil, top each with sliced onion (4-5 rings) and matchstick carrots (about 8 sticks). On top, pour 1/4 cup tomato steak sauce mixture. Wrap securely in foil.

Grill:
Grill fish packets over medium heat 8 - 10 minutes (depending on thickness of fish) or until fish flakes with a fork.

Serves 4

Snook Supreme
By Chef Lynan

With the opening of Snook Season on September 1st I know I am going to be cooking up some fresh Snook at our lodge. One of my favorite recipes for Roasting Snook is simple and very easy to prepare. When baking fish keep in mind “less is better” meaning don’t over cook fish.

**Roasted Snook with Grape Tomatoes & Leeks**

2 pounds of Snook, skinned & boneless
Cut into stakes about 1 ½ “ Thick
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
3 to 4 tablespoons of Olive oil
1-½ cups of fresh Grape Tomatoes
3 large Leeks, split, washed & julienned
3 minced shallots
¼ cup of green olives
3 tablespoons of Capers
¼ to ½ cup of white Vermouth
½ cup of Chicken broth
2 tablespoons of Tarragon
3 tablespoons of butter
Preheat Oven to 400 degrees. Season the Snook with salt and pepper. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet. Sear the Tomatoes over medium heat, add in the Leeks, and cook together for 3 to 4 minutes. Add in the Shallots, olives, capers, vermouth and chicken stock. Cook for 5 to 6 minutes over medium heat or until the sauce reduces a little. Pour the vegetable mixture into an oven proof casserole dish. Place the Snook on top of the bed of vegetable mixture and roast for no more then 6 to 8 minutes. Gently remove the Snook from the dish, stir in the butter and tarragon and then spoon the vegetable sauce around the Snook.

Serves 4.
# Chapter XI  Common Species of Saltwater Fish

*Names and Pictures of 58 Saltwater Species*

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<td><img src="image" alt="Pinfish" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Pompano, African" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Pompano, Florida" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porgy, Jolthead</td>
<td>Porgy, Saucereye</td>
<td>Sailfish</td>
<td>Shark, Blue</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Porgy, Jolthead" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Porgy, Saucereye" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Sailfish" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Shark, Blue" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shark, Dusky</td>
<td>Shark, Hammerhead</td>
<td>Shark, Lemon</td>
<td>Shark, Mako</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Shark, Dusky" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Shark, Hammerhead" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Shark, Lemon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Shark, Mako" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shark, Scalloped Hammerhead</td>
<td>Shark, Thresher</td>
<td>Shark, Tiger</td>
<td>Sheepshead</td>
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<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Snapper, Cubera</td>
<td>Snapper, Red</td>
<td>Spadefish, Atlantic</td>
<td>Spearfish, Longbill</td>
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<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image8.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Swordfish</td>
<td>Tarpon</td>
<td>Tilefish, Sand</td>
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<td><img src="image11.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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<td>Tautog</td>
<td>Triggerfish, Gray</td>
<td>Trout, Gray</td>
<td>Trout, Speckled</td>
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<td><img src="image14.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image15.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image16.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuna, Bigeye</td>
<td>Tuna, Blackfin</td>
<td>Tuna, Bluefin</td>
<td>Tuna, Skipjack</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image17.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image18.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image19.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuna, Yellowfin</td>
<td>Wahoo</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image21.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image22.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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