

Grub Fishing in The Surf and Bay

By Bill Varney, Jr.



Anglers aren't the only ones who slow down in winter, fish do too. As ocean waters cool the metabolism and activity of surf fish diminishes significantly. As a result, both feeding frequency and aggressiveness toward catching food changes. Lucky for us, the effect of cold winter water plays right into the hands of the grub angler.

As the warm water of fall begins to cool sand crabs go into hibernation. Meanwhile, surf fish continue to scour the surf for any forage to carry them though the year. Because food becomes scarce in winter months, fish are always looking for an opportunity to find something good to eat.

That's why so many artificial lures work well during the winter. Native baits are scarcer during this time but fish still need to eat--So an enticing meal swimming by may get a bite. One of my favorite lures to use for a variety of surfperch in the winter months are surf grubs. Although they work year-round, they seem especially effective during cold-water months.

Plastic grubs come in two distinct shapes: Curley tail and swim tail varieties. I like to use both shapes in the surf. The curly tail imitates a small baitfish

while the swim tail adds a thumping vibration to the presentation. One and one-half to three inch grubs seem to work best in the surf.



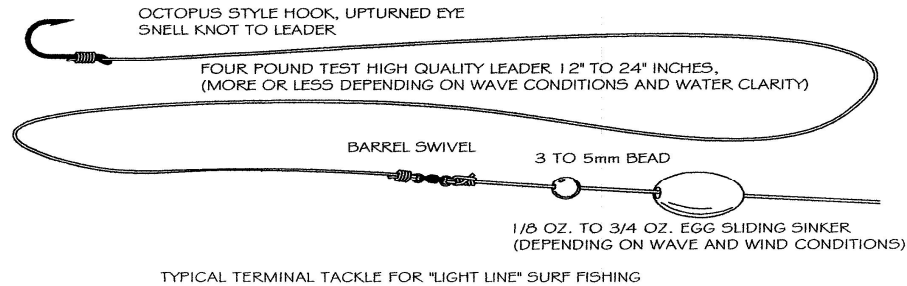
Use different grub colors depending on the color of the water you are fishing. With waves crashing and churned turbidity, most surf fishing areas have cloudy water. Fish cannot easily see whites and muted colors. Dark colors, which cast a more enticing shadow and match surrounding bait, work best. Motor oil, red flake, gray flake, brown and orange seem to work well.

For the best chance of catching fish always be sure to use colors that resemble the colors of food that occur naturally in the area you are fishing. This is true for all lures used in the surf. Take a look at the bait you find at the beach. Mussel and clams have brown and orange colored meat, sand crabs are gray and sidewinders crabs are motor oil green and brown. These are the colors you should use as they best imitate the colors of forage living near and on shore.

Kalin, Big Hammer and Slider lure companies manufacture some great surf grubs. Be sure to pick up a variety of colors and feel free to try several out once you reach the beach to find out what fish are eating that day.

The best way to present grubs to hungry fish is on the Carolina Rig. This is a simple rig and is made up of a sliding egg sinker, a 6mm bead, a swivel, leader material and a very sharp hook.

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On the beach, use the sinker that will best keep your bait on the bottom. Heavier in big surf and lighter in smaller surf. When fishing the bay, downsize your sinker to 1/8 or 1/4 ounce. In the bay you'll get plenty of casting distance and don't need much weight to stay on the bottom.

Leader size will vary. In big surf or strong currents use an 8" to 16" fluorocarbon leader. In small surf, a longer leader will work fine as long as it stays on the bottom. When fishing the bay I like to use a long leader. Because there is very little water movement in the bay you'll need to have your grub a stealth distance from your sinker.

At the end of my leader is a sharp hook. Sharp hooks may be the most important part of your rig. There are several good hooks available on the market but my favorites are black, size two or four, Gamakatsu split shot/drop hooks, Owner mosquito hooks or Mustad Ultra Point hooks. All three are thin wire hooks that are very sharp and work perfectly with grubs.

Now that you have the rig set up it's time to hook the grub. Grubs must be placed on the hook so they lay as flat as possible. Any small turn in the grub will cause it to spin and not appear natural.

The first step in hooking a grub is to place the hook against the bait to see where the hook's end will punch through the grub body. Next, check the grub to see if it has lines, like a seam, left by the mold. If so, be sure to center your hook between those lines.

Holding the grub between thumb and forefinger insert the hook into the center of the head and pull the hook toward the tail making sure to keep it centered in the grub. Once the hook is far enough down so the eye of the hook is now at the head of the grub exit with the hook's sharp end. Now that the hook's shaft is buried in the grub stop and pull the grub back toward the eye. This will even-out the grub and help to keep it flat on the hook.



Think about presentation---the more the grub looks like it's flat and freely moving through the water (without a hook) the better chance you'll get a bite. Take a moment to pull the grub just underwater in front of you and make sure it swims freely and doesn't spin. Now you are ready to cast out.

Now that you know how to rig a grub the next step is finding the best way to present this bait to surf fish. When fishing the beach the grub allows you to cover the greatest area and search for fish. Begin by fan casting—that is, casting to the left side, straight out and to the right. Try to cover as much area as possible. If you don't get bites after ten minutes move down the beach and try again until you find the fish.

When fishing the bay, look for structure areas (docks, pilings, rocks, etc.) and areas of moving water. With a very light sinker and shortened leader cast tight to this structure and slowly work your bait back to shore. When fishing the bay at night for sand and spotted bay bass use a black grub on a very short leader and simply walk it along docks and rocks for fish.

At both the beach and in the bay, let your bait sink to the bottom and slowly retrieve it back. The colder the water the *slower* your retrieve should be, so

as to mimic the slowed metabolism of fish. Always keep your line tight to your sinker and your bait on the bottom.



Lastly, comes the dippin'. I place about two ounces of fish attractant in a small snack size zip bag. My favorite fish attractant without question? Taco shop hot sauce! I use two packets (can't tell if I like Taco Bell® or Del Taco® the best). Just dip your grub (or really any bait) into the sauce and cast it out. Every few casts take a moment to reapply. You'll be amazed by how many more fish you catch with this simple addition. *Please believe me*—it really works!

Halibut, barred surfperch, yellowfin croaker, walleye surfperch and many other surf fish are attracted to grubs. Although grubs work all year long they seem to work their very best in winter when bait is scarce and fish are hungry.