

# 10 Tips To Improve Your Winter Surf Fishing

By Bill Varney Jr.



**W**hen it comes to winter surf fishing this winter is the real deal. Wind, rain and waves are crashing along the coast and making surf fishing difficult. At times like these don't just give up, work around the obstacles and you'll find tons of great shore fishing.

Big surf and high winds will completely change the topography of the beach. Holes and troughs that you fished in the summer will be completely gone. Start by walking the beach at low tide and making note of the new holes, troughs and location of structure that's covered at high tide. Then take the tips below and put them into place. With a little bit of adjustment you'll make it over the winter hump and into some good surf fishing.

1. Watch the weather. Wind, rain and big surf means you'll need to wait until next week to fish the beach. Generally, just before a storm tends to be a great time to fish as low pressure compresses the atmosphere and produces calm conditions that signal fish to forage before the coming storm. Regularly, check beach webcams and sites like: [wavecast.com/socal/](http://wavecast.com/socal/), surfline, fishweather, etc.
2. When using grubs, worms and lures slow your retrieve way down. Cold water means fish have slowed down too. The colder the water, the slower your retrieve should be.
3. In winter, fish find a safe haven near rocks. Fish up against jetties, harbor entrances and anywhere you find piles of rocks that hold food and provide shelter. The open beach will have pockets of fish but the rocks will have concentrations.
4. Two-inch motor oil, clear with red flakes and motor oil red flake grubs work great for perch. Use the Carolina Rig with a twenty-inch leader. Always try to match the size and color of your bait with what occurs naturally around the area you are fishing.
5. Use more weight than less. All surf fish feed on the bottom. If you fish for twenty-minutes and don't get a bite try a heavier egg sinker. In big surf use up to one ounce of weight. In small surf, as little as one-quarter ounce.
6. Fan casting a grub, bait or lure in winter will help you locate the fish. Start by casting straight out, then to the left, then to the right and slowly retrieving toward shore. Do this five times. If you don't catch a fish, move 100 yards down the beach and repeat. Surf fish congregate in troughs and holes in winter. Unlike summer (when fish spread out along the beach), you may have to search for concentrations of fish before finding the "mother-lode".

7. If you're looking for sand crabs in winter the only place you'll find them is under piers near pilings and in the sand piled up against rocks and cement. Cold winter water sends most sand crabs into hibernation—but a few are always left near the surface in structure areas.

8. During winter, if you want to catch a huge perch, fish up against a rock jetty with a very light sinker and a sidewinder crab. Present the crab on the Carolina Rig using a ten-inch leader of six-pound fluorocarbon and a one-fourth ounce egg sinker.

“Sidewinders” are the lined shore crabs you see scurrying across rocks at almost every beach, harbor or jetty. You may catch them on jetties or find them inside the harbor beneath small rocks. *If you wish to keep your fingers use the ones about the size of a dime.*

9. When huge storms crash along the coast and beach conditions are poor, move inside the bays and harbors. This is where the winter surf fish come to hide. Surf fish migrate in late fall into the peace and serenity of harbors and estuaries. This is where they find food and calm during winter storms. Some of the biggest corbina and spotfin croaker along the coast vacation here.

10. When fishing with grubs don't forget to use “hot sauce.” Take a small snack zip-top bag and squirt two packets of Del Taco, Taco Bell or your favorite hot sauce into the bag. Dip your grub about every five casts or so to add flavor and you'll be amazed at how many fish you catch. Winter surf fish are not as aggressive as summer fish so hot sauce helps them hold on—while you set the hook.

Unlike so many runs of fish, surf fish have no season—it's good all year. To be successful you just need to change a few of your approaches, locations and techniques to catch up with the fish of winter. Take some time to walk the beach or bay at low tide and find the structure and troughs where fish hide. Use resources like

Google Earth and websites like [fishthesurf.com](http://fishthesurf.com), [fishingnetwork.net](http://fishingnetwork.net) and Facebook clubs like California Surf Fishing, West Coast Surf fishing and Santa Barbara Surf Fishing to see what other anglers are using at the beach. Combine the tools of observation and instinct to make winter the best surf fishing months of them all.