

Surf Fishing: Reader's Question and Answer



Everyday I get some great surf fishing questions by email. Taking just a few from the bowels of my inbox here is a sample of my favorites over the years.

I'm just curious about the fact that you didn't mention anything about popular scents and attractants in your seminar. Have you used them and do you think they are effective?

David

Yes, I often use scents and they are not only effective but during winter, almost essential. There are many different varieties of scent on the market and they almost all work very well.

With that said, I do have a bit of a different approach. This technique was probably discovered out of my love for fast food tacos. I prefer to use taco sauce. Imagine yourself pulling out of

your favorite taco drive thru and wondering what you're going to do with all those hot sauce packets?

Well, now you know. It's time to use them for activating your bait---Especially grubs and other artificial lures.

I take two packets (hot, mild doesn't matter) and squirt them into a snack-sized ziptop. Every five casts I recoat my bait. The oil in the sauce holds it to the grub and the vinegar gives the grub a flavor so the fish feel the soft plastic and then clamp down on it because of the flavor.

You'd be amazed at how many fish I have caught on the sauce. Plus, if a taco washes ashore I'm ready to eat!

Bill, I am a new surf fisherman and have read your book cover to cover several times, but one thing I am still not clear on is, when using live bait in the winter, what type of motion should you use? Is it simply a cast out from shore and let it sit, fast reel or other pole movement?

Mark

Thanks Mark for the note. In winter, surf fish (and most fish for that matter) really slow down their metabolism. As a result, they eat less and move much slower than in the warmer summer months.

I like to fan cast my bait and slowly retrieve it back. When fan casting first start by casting straight out. Then cast to both your left and right, retrieving slowly each time, until you get a bite. If you don't get a bite on those casts walk up the beach one-hundred feet and try it again.

The colder the weather the slower I retrieve it. During the colder months, fish will also congregate near structure. You'll find some of your best spots in the cool months of winter near jetties, harbor entrances and estuaries.

When fishing on the open beach always keep a wary eye for holes and troughs less than sixty-feet from the sand that work to hide fish from the thunderous winter surf.

Some of my favorite baits for winter are grubs, ghost shrimp, sidewinder crabs, clams and worms.

On my last visit surf fishing, I was only finding small perch and croaker. They were consistently biting in this one spot but nothing too big. What would you do in this situation? Would you move, cast further out or try a bigger bait? If there is small fish, then there are bigger ones in the same place?

Martin

Most perch and croaker school in like sizes. But with that said there will always be a few big ones mixed in.

When I encounter small fish I will sometimes move down the beach or cast past them. Other times I will just use a larger bait. A good example would be to use a small bait like a Gulp! Sandworm to start. Once you find the fish switch to a larger bait, like a sidewinder crab.

In my experience smaller fish will always make it to your bait first. But if the offering is larger, it will last long enough for a big spawner to swim up and crush your bait!

I would like to know how you catch your sand crabs? I have never used them myself but I will be taking a few newbies out and would like to have some fresh bait. What suggestions do you have?

Tom

You will find sand crabs on most beaches about ten feet below the high tide mark. In Southern California sand crabs come to the surface when water temperature reaches around sixty degrees.

To find a bed of crabs wait for waves to wash over the beach and look for “V” shapes created by the receding waves in the sand. This is where you want to dig. Later in the summer you may find them at low tide farther out on the exposed sand bar.

You have several ways to collect them. I like to use a galvanized crab rake made by Promar. But many other methods

work too. Dig by hand and place them in a container so they can be washed. Purchase an inexpensive colander and use that to sift through the sand.

My favorite idea was one developed by one of the guys at our on-the-beach seminar. He spent 99cents to buy a clothes-washing bag. Just a bag made of netting about the size of a pillowcase with a zipper on top. At the beach he just unzipped it, filled it quickly with sand and then went to the water and wash off a whole pile of crabs. Brilliant!!

A quick question: I was going to try and dig for sand crabs on Friday evening to use early Saturday morning. What would be the best way to keep them alive overnight? I know you are the sand crab expert so I thought I would ask you...

Ricky

Thanks for the note! The best way to keep sand crabs alive is to first rinse them off at the beach to remove most of the sand. Bring them home in a plastic container with a small piece of kelp on top of them (no water or sand). This kelp will help keep them cool.

Sand crabs are fragile and will last three or four days provided you keep them cool and dry. Because crabs live in a temperature range of about 50-70 degrees don't put them in the refrigerator or in salt water. I like to keep them in a small dry plastic container inside an ice chest. I place a frozen bottle of water near them (but not touching their container) and rinse them once per day with refrigerated salt water I collected at the beach.

Sand crabs also like it dark so I will place a wet rag over their container and provided I don't disturb them too often, they should stay fresh, alive and ready to fish.

I wanted to ask you about using squid for bait. You don't seem to talk about it much in Western Outdoor articles. Or I missed it. Is there any information you can give me on using squid for bait?

Kevin

In general, using squid at the beach seems to attract mostly rays and sharks. Although, near rock areas you can catch just about anything with it. Eventhough I have not had a lot of luck on the open beach, Brad my fishing buddy, landed a forty-five pound stripped bass on a strip of squid using just six-pound test in Newport Beach.

Try this when you are fishing near rocks: I like to take squid and cut it into strips about the width of a pencil. I then put the strips and a piece of mussel together in a zip top bag and into the refrigerator. The next day I use it for bait and it has a great orange/brown color and an irresistibile ordor that attracts almost every fish. Give it a try, you'll be surprised at how well it works. Just don't leave it in your car too long as it will also surprise you how much your car will stink!