



Fishing with Live and Cut Bait in the Backwater

It is believed by many fishermen that fishing with live and cut bait is generally more productive than using artificial lures. Most fishermen will also tend to tip their jigs with a piece of shrimp in order to increase fish strikes.

Small Live Bait

Primarily 3 to 5" white bait (includes Pilchards, Greenbacks, Sardines, Threadfin Herring), finger Mullet, small Pinfish and shrimp.

Large Live Bait

Includes 6 to 8" white bait, larger Mullet, Large Pinfish, small Ladyfish, Blue Crabs and Catfish.

Cut Bait

Cut up chunks of Ladyfish, large Mullet, Catfish, Lizard Fish, Squirrel Fish and large white bait.

Small white bait will catch more fish but Large white and cut bait will catch the big Snook, Redfish and Tarpon. The disadvantage of using live bait is the need to purchase, catch and keep the live bait when it is needed. Catfish tails and chunks are a good bait for Tarpon.

Catching Live Bait

Cast netting for white bait, mullet and small Pinfish works well. Live bait caught with a cast net does not hold up well and needs to be used immediately for best results. Some live bait may last until the next day but expect a significant die-off.

Catching large white bait with a sabiki rig works best as the bait is less stressed and holds up better. For example large Threadfin Herring and Pinfish can be kept for days and even weeks if kept in a large pen (5 feet and larger).

Ladyfish to be used for cut bait can be caught by hook/jigs and is an excellent bait but needs to be used immediately or within a few days. Frozen Ladyfish do not stay on a hook well.

Small Ladyfish are an excellent live bait for Tarpon and large Snook. Mullet will not take a hook and can be caught using a cast net. Frozen mullet can be used effectively as cut bait.

Rigging Live and Cut Bait

Use a hook size that is tailored to the size of the bait; both for live and cut. Use small hooks (1/0-2/0) for small live bait and larger hooks (3/0-6/0) for large live bait and cut bait. When fishing for Tarpon, larger hooks up to 9/0 can be used with cut bait.

Casting and Freelining Live Bait

Use 7 foot to 7.5 foot rods, 15-20 lb braid and 20 to 30lb Fluorocarbon leaders. Do not use any terminal tackle to join braid to leaders. Hook small live bait through the

nose(sideways) so as to not suffocate your bait. You can also hook live bait through the tail which forces the bait to swim towards the shallows. A split shot(s) may be added if fishing deeper depths. Using a popping cork is a very effective method when fishing small white bait and shrimp especially when fishing over oyster beds and along mangrove shorelines.

The same technique can be used for large bait except use heavier equipment, 30 to 40lb braid and up to 50 to 60lb fluorocarbon leaders. Freelining live bait in moving water is very effective when fishing for Tarpon and large Snook. For large Tarpon increase braid up to 80lbs and use six-foot leaders up to 80lbs.

Casting and Freelining Cut Bait.

Use the same technique for cut bait as covered above for live bait. The only difference is that you can increase the size and weight of your equipment. Cut bait is allowed to sink to the bottom and fish will not see the braid or leader. Monofilament leaders may also be used when fishing with cut bait and when fishing for Tarpon increase leader weight up to 125 lbs. Using heavier gear is especially important if fishing under docks or areas with heavy debris. Add an egg sinker or use bare jig head for cut bait placed in moving water. Do not move cut bait. Wait until a fish takes the bait or the bait is relocated to another spot.