

## How to Catch Redfish – A Beginner’s Guide (Article for Lurenet)

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**Hard fighting, great eating and widely available in coastal waters, redfish or red drum are outstanding game fish. Here’s what you need to know to get into the redfish game.**



So, you want to catch redfish. Where do you start? In this guide we’ll cover what equipment you need, where to fish, and what lures and baits to use to catch these great gamefish.

Red drum, most commonly called redfish, rank among of the most popular coastal saltwater recreational fish species. Inhabiting coastal waters from New England to Florida and from Florida to Texas, redfish are hearty, strong-fighting fish that are excellent on the table.

Redfish thrive in a variety of coastal habitats and can be caught using an assortment of techniques and baits.

Young redfish make their homes inshore until they are about four years old and 28 inches in length. As adults they spend most of their time in deeper coastal waters, moving offshore during the coldest parts of the year and migrating inshore annually in late summer to spawn.

Redfish range from juvenile “puppy drum” to enormous “bull redfish.” The IGFA world record red drum is a 94-pound, 2-ounce giant.

### **Equipment for Catching Redfish**



You don’t need expensive, specialized gear to catch redfish. A 3000-size spinning reel on a matching 7-foot medium action rod will work for most situations. Spool the reel with 20-pound test braid and use a 30-pound-test leader.

This setup can accommodate baits and lures of assorted sizes and weights. It’s light enough to cast all day without fatigue but heavy enough to handle all but the largest redfish.

If you plan to fish an area where smaller redfish are most prevalent, you can go with a 2500-size spinning reel on a medium-light rod. With this combination, use 15-pound braid with a 20-pound leader.

For targeting bull reds, choose a 5000- to 6000-size spinning reel on a 7- or 7 1/2-foot medium-heavy rod. Use braided line in the 30- to 50-pound test range with a monofilament or fluorocarbon leader of 60- to 80-pound test.

For surf fishing in rough and windy conditions a 9- to 11-foot surf rod paired with a 5000 series spinning reel is needed. Spool the reel with 30-pound test line and use 50-pound test leader. With this rod/reel combo you can launch heavy lures and baits far into the surf. In calm conditions, the 3000-size reel with a 7-foot medium rod setup will get the job done.

## Where to Fish



Knowing how redfish hunt and feed is the key to locating them.

Redfish are opportunistic feeders that consume a broad range of small fish and crustaceans. They are primarily bottom feeders but will attack free-swimming baits throughout the water column.

Structure-oriented fish, red drum can be found near points, docks, pilings, and downed trees where they can ambush forage. As moving water carries baitfish and crustaceans past the redfish's cover, they dart out and grab an easy meal.

Their acute sense of smell allows them to aggressively pursue and catch prey in shallow water. They are often found prowling shallow grass beds, oyster bars, or mud flats searching for small fish, crabs, shrimp, squid and marine worms.

### **Fishing the Beach**

An ability to locate the specific areas that are most likely to hold redfish is the single most important aspect of surf fishing. Take time to observe the wave action and try to identify the bars that run parallel to the beach. You are looking for deeper troughs that run between the bars, and for breaks or cuts at the ends of these bars. These deeper areas are where you'll find redfish searching for a meal as wave and tide movement stir up crustaceans and small fish.

Other areas that may hold redfish include inlets, jetties, piers and any other structure along the beach.

### **Banks and Bridges**

Fishing the banks of creeks, canals and marshes can be productive. One of the best ways to find these spots is to visit a local tackle shop and ask about locations, baits and techniques. Most shops willingly share this type of information.

You can also scan online fishing forums and fishing reports to identify potential fishing spots. Again, focus on points, creek intersections, or locations with oyster bars, docks, or pilings.

Because bridges and piers have built-in structure that attracts baitfish, they can be great spots to catch redfish. Before fishing a bridge, be certain that you can fish it safely. Inshore fishing piers are another choice that provide fantastic access to redfish waters.

### **Fishing from a Boat**

When fishing in a boat, it's easy to get overwhelmed with deciding where to start fishing. With miles of shoreline and acres of open water to choose from, the options are endless.

Begin your search for redfish by focusing on the shoreline. It is usually easier to find them along a bank than it is out in open water.

Review nautical charts of the general areas you plan to fish. Find and make a note of points, creek intersections, flats, channels and drop-offs. Also use Google Earth to try to locate oyster reefs, grass flats, docks, piers and downed trees.

Once on the water, quietly approach the areas you identified. Use a trolling motor to get into casting range or turn off the main motor and drift in. Use an anchor, Power-Pole, or trolling motor to hold the boat in place so you can comfortably cast to the shoreline or structure.

Continuously look for signs of baitfish and other indications that a food source is present. Redfish will congregate where they can find a meal.

Fish an area for about ten minutes. If you aren't getting strikes and if you don't see signs of baitfish or surface activity, move to another spot.

## Lures & Baits for Redfish



One great thing about redfish is that you can catch them on a wide variety of lures and baits. Both artificial and natural baits catch plenty of redfish. Here are some specific suggestions for beginners.

### Artificial Lures

Using artificial lures is the preferred method of fishing for many anglers. It's more active than bait fishing as you steadily cast and retrieve your lure. When searching for fish, you can cover water faster than you can by fishing with bait. As a bonus, the excitement of a strike on a lure is hard to beat!

Any of the rod and reel combinations described earlier can be used with artificial lures. The rigging is simple, attach a leader to the mainline and tie a lure to the leader.

Proven artificials for redfish include:

Gold Spoon: When retrieved at a medium-fast pace, redfish find the wobbling action of a spoon irresistible. The [Bomber Who Dat Spoon](#) is weedless and has the added element of a rattle and comes in Gold/Black/Orange and a straight metallic Gold.

Soft Plastics rigged on a jig head: If you had to choose one artificial bait for redfish, it should be a soft plastic on a jig head. Retrieve the lure with a lift-pause-lift motion that raises the jig off the bottom and then lets it settle. Use a 1/8- to 1/2-ounce jig head. Select the weight based on the wind, current and water depth. Soft plastic options are endless. The YUM [Spine Craw](#), [Pulse](#) and [Houdini Shad](#) all produce plenty of redfish.

Spinnerbaits: A spinnerbait, like a [Bomber Drumbeater](#), combines the flash of a spoon and the action of a soft plastic. Choose a 1/4-ounce spinnerbait and retrieve it at a medium-slow speed. The flash of the blade makes this bait extremely visible in stained or murky water, and the vibration helps fish home in on the bait.

Topwater Lures: Without a doubt, a redfish striking a topwater lure is an experience that you won't forget. A topwater lure retrieved with a walk-the-dog action creates a surface commotion that redfish can sense and home in on from a distance. Topwater lures in the 3 1/2- to 4-inch range, such as the [Heddon Super Spook Jr](#), are good choices.

## **Natural Bait**

Cut natural baits fished on the bottom on Carolina rigs are simple and effective for catching redfish. This type of fishing works great for beginners and young anglers because you just cast your bait to the target area, then let it soak and disperse its scent. Redfish patrolling the area will use their acute sense of smell to find the bait.

Mullet, menhaden, ladyfish and croaker are effective. Choose fresh bait over frozen, if available. Pieces of squid and shrimp also work. Fresh crab may be the ultimate natural bait for redfish. Be sure to check local regulations before gathering crabs, as many states have strict size and quantity requirements.

In addition to sight and scent, redfish can locate live bait by the sounds and vibrations it gives off. Whether fished on the bottom or suspended under a cork, cast the to the target area, and the bait's motion will attract any nearby redfish. A Bomber Paradise Popper served double duty of calling fish with rattles and pops and suspending the bait in the zone.

Mullet, menhaden, mud minnows and pinfish are all proven live bait choices. Live shrimp is the go-to live bait for redfish in many areas. Live small crabs are another choice, where legal.

## Tips & Techniques



- Add scented attractants to your artificial lures to make them extra enticing.
- If you have a choice of which shoreline to fish, choose the one that the wind is blowing onto. The onshore breeze concentrates baitfish along the bank, which in turn attracts redfish.
- Redfish prefer moving water over still water. Try to plan your fishing to avoid slack tides.
- In hot weather, redfish will congregate in the shade of docks, piers, partially submerged trees, mangroves, and other structures that block the sun.
- When targeting large redfish, your equipment needs to be stout enough to catch and release the fish quickly. This maximizes the fish's chance of survival and helps preserve the breeding stock for the future.

