

# The Serious Tackle Box

Experienced Fishing Advice To  
Make Fishing Great Again

With Chris Gonzales

## Red Snapper Top to Bottom

**Red snapper – get'em while you can.** Another year will be in the books before you know it! Generally speaking, the most important part of catching red snapper is simply being where they are. If you don't have that information, there is an assortment of maps and books that are widely available at most coastal tackle shops and sporting goods stores to guide you. The many party boats, charter boats, and their knowledgeable captains along our Texas coast will get you there, too. Remember that no matter whose boat you're on, simple red snapper rigging gets the job done.

A number of methods along this line to be covered here will do just that - get the job done from the top to the bottom of the water column.

The freelined, or unweighted rigging shown at the top of the illustration is as basic as it gets. The freelined bait sinks slowly on its own weight plus that of the hook, leader, and swivel. For the most part, this works best in a light current situation. The through the mouth and out of the gill of the baitfish allows the hook to be placed toward the tail - this gets the short strikers most of the time. Size an egg weight as needed, and place it on the line above the swivel to get your baitfish to the depth that the snapper is suspending.

Current strength will control the size of the egg weight needed for getting to that depth; a 1/4 to 2 oz. egg weight will be sufficient 99% of the time. This rigging also works for kingfish when a wire leader is used in place of the mono; use camo brown wire such as #7, 86# Malin. A wire leader also aids a bit with the hookset- a big snapper



can't clamp down on the wire, so it slides through its closed jaws as the line comes tight.

The baitfish on the freelined or lightly weighted rig can also be nose-hooked. This lets the hook work to its best predator-attracting potential. Most of the time, hungry snapper will inhale the whole baitfish - they will also bite off just the rear half (short strikers). If you get a hit and a miss, wait a few seconds, your snapper or another one is likely to soon eat the head half. Reeling in too quickly could cause you to miss a return customer. This whole exciting scenario can be clearly seen when red snappers are feeding shallow.

The illustration's sow rig has the same factors controlling the size of its egg weight as the freelined rig. The water depth also plays a part; 2 to 8 ounces is usually sufficient. While a nose-hooked dead bait

### Red Snapper - Top to Bottom



#### FREELINED NEAR THE SURFACE TO THE MID DEPTHS

With little current, baitfish will slowly sink thru the water column from its weight plus the rigging



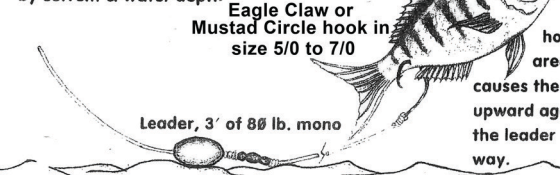
Leader, 3' of 60 to 80 lb. mono

Add egg wt. of 1/4 to 1 oz. ahead of swivel to increase sink rate and depth as the current demands

Eagle Claw or Mustad Circle hook thru mouth & gill plate & hooked in the lower mid body

#### SOW RIGGED AT THE BOTTOM

Egg weight, 2 to 8 oz, size dictated by current & water depth



Leader, 3' of 80 lb. mono

Eagle Claw or Mustad Circle hook in size 5/0 to 7/0

Live baitfish hooked in anal vent area. This hooking causes the baitfish to swim upward against the tug of the leader and into harm's way.

works well, live is normally light years ahead. Hooking a live baitfish in the vent area makes it struggle upward against the weight of the hook and leader. The vibrations generated are like a dinner bell to the big red snappers in the area, plus the grouper, amberjack, and ling, to name a few - your bait's headed into harm's way for sure.

Vent area hooked baitfish also have an added hookup advantage. With your hook toward the bait fish's tail and it likely being eaten head first, the predator fish, even if it feels the hook as being something unnatural, the swallowing process may be too far along for it to spit your bait. At that point, a hookup is almost assured.

With the bottom rig, you can also slowly play out line, letting your live baitfish swim up a bit. Tighten down for the hookset when you feel any increased speed or weight on the tightening line. Don't forget that when using a circle hook to let the line come tight, then reel down hard. Hooksets are sure and very few come unbuttoned during the fight to the surface when using a circle hook.

Back to the baitfish. . .use the freshest available Spanish sardines,

cigar minnows, sand trout, tinker mackerel, croakers, etc. As far as live goes, buy or catch them before you go, or catch them when you get offshore. Bring a bait rod, small hooks, bait, or your favorite sabiki rig. Those caught on site are what the area's predators had been scoping out when you got there. Give them what they want.

Use these basic rigging methods as outlined and they will out-fish most others many times over. These simple rigging methods will enable you to catch the red snapper you're after plus the numerous other species already mentioned. Give them a shot, you won't be disappointed.

Chris Gonzales  
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