

HOW TO PREPARE FOR COOKING

Red drum have firm, white flesh and moderate flavor, and are excellent table fare fried, baked, grilled or in ceviche. Recipes for preparation of red drum, and other Texas sea foods, are available on the Internet, as well as local bookstores, seafood markets and grocery stores.

Recipes for preparation of red drum and other Texas seafoods are available by writing:

Texas Sea Grant College Program
2700 Earl Rudder Freeway S., Suite 1800
College Station, Texas 77845

It is important to care for your fish properly once it has been caught. The best way to preserve the taste and texture of your fish is to gut it and place it on ice as soon as you catch it, and then finish cleaning it as soon as you get it home.



Life's better outside.®



4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744 www.tpwd.state.tx.us

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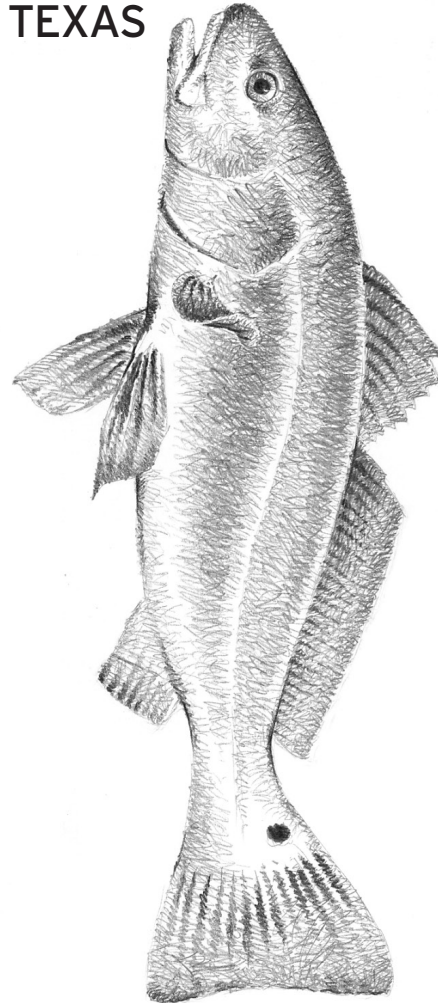
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COASTAL FISHERIES

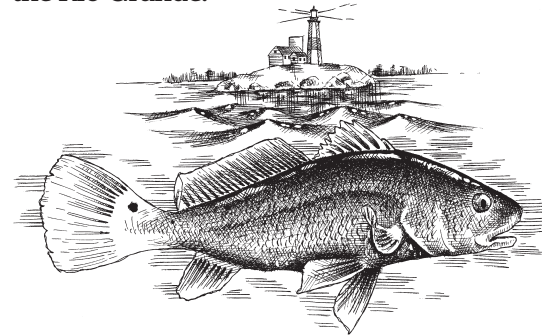
Red Drum

IN TEXAS



Life's better outside.®

The red drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*), commonly known in Texas as redfish, was popularized in the early 1980s by Chef Paul Prudhomme when he created “blackened redfish.” The recipe featured red drum filets dipped in butter, rubbed with Cajun spices, and then seared in a very hot skillet. One taste and the public was hooked. Since then, red drum have become a highly sought-after game fish and are the second-most popular saltwater fish sought in Texas, falling just behind spotted seatrout. Since its designation as a game fish in 1981, red drum numbers have steadily increased in Texas and can now be found in good numbers in all of Texas’ coastal waters from Sabine Lake to the Rio Grande.



PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The red drum is a member of the drum family (*Sciaenidae*) and is closely related to the spotted seatrout, Atlantic croaker, spot, and black drum. Red drum can be identified by their reddish-bronze color, sub-terminal mouth (on the bottom front) and large black spot at the base of the tail. While it is not uncommon for a red drum to have multiple spots along its body (10 or more are not uncommon), it is extremely rare for one to have no spots.

SPAWNING

In Texas, red drum reach sexual maturity between 3 and 4 years of age and about 30 inches in length. Spawning occurs in the nearshore waters of the Gulf of Mexico from August through November, with one fish spawning 200,000 to 2 million eggs per spawn every two to four days. This equates to 20 - 40 million eggs per fish, per year. The eggs hatch within 24 hours and are passively transported into the bays by the wind and tidal currents. There they will stay until they reach maturity and once again head offshore to repeat the reproductive cycle.

GROWTH

Red drum are a fast-growing fish reaching 12 inches in length and 1 pound in weight at age 1. The approximate lengths at age are as follows:

AGE	LENGTH
1	12 inches
2	19 inches
3	24 inches
4	27 inches
5	30 inches
6	32 inches
7	34 inches
8	35 inches
9	36 inches
10	37 inches

The world-record red drum weighed 94 pounds and was caught off the coast of North Carolina. The current Texas rod-and-reel record weighed 59.5 lbs., measured 54.25 inches (total length), and was caught on January 30, 2000. Based on TPWD data, the average size of red drum in Texas’ bays is approximately 19 inches. Prior to your fishing trip, be sure you are familiar with the size, possession and bag limits when you fish on the Texas Gulf Coast. This information can be found in the current *Texas Parks and Wildlife Outdoor Annual* or online at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/annual/fish

FEEDING

Red drum can be voracious feeders and will eat crabs, shrimp, fish, and just about anything else that they can catch and swallow. Generally they feed on the bottom but will feed in the water column, or even on the surface, when the opportunity arises. Frequently a phenomenon called tailing occurs when red drum feed in shallow water with their heads down and their tails sticking out of the water. Large schools of red drum can often be seen exhibiting this behavior on the flats during the summer months.

HABITAT

Young red drum prefer shallow waters (1 - 4 feet deep) along the edges of bays. They are often found in water so shallow that their backs are exposed while swimming. During cold events, large numbers of red drum can be found in tidal creeks and rivers or in deep water channels. They can live in fresh water and have been found many miles upriver.

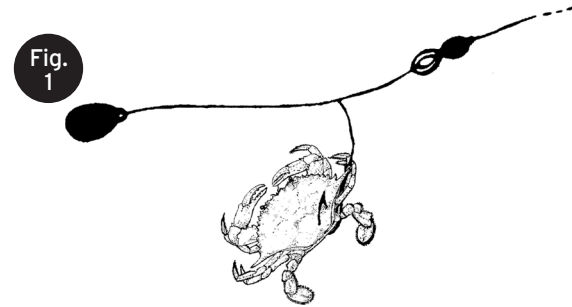
They are found over all bottom types, but they seem to prefer areas with submerged vegetation, soft mud, or oyster reefs. Breaks in the continuity of shorelines such as coves, points, jetties, old pier pilings, and guts also attract them.

MANAGEMENT

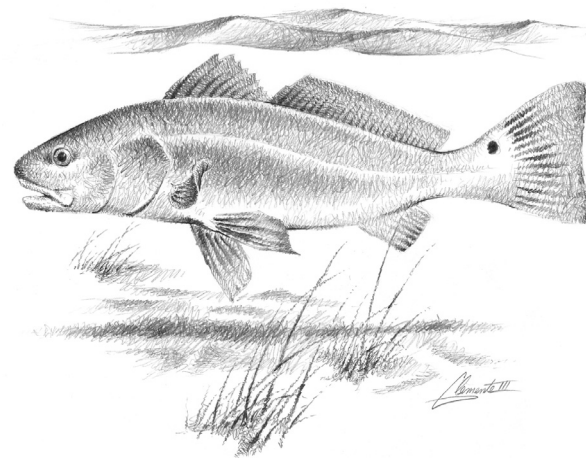
TPWD is actively involved in the conservation of this sport fish. Populations are monitored by biological surveys including seasonal gill nets, monthly bag seines, and creel surveys. These efforts provide the necessary data to assess and manage red drum populations. As with most other fisheries, the most effective way to protect this resource is through the use of size and bag limits.

HOW TO CATCH

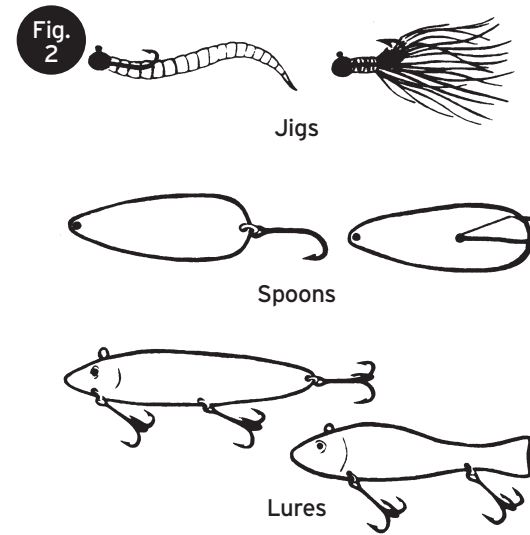
One of the attractive characteristics of this fish is its willingness to take most kinds of bait, both natural and artificial. The best natural baits are live shrimp, small finger mullet, Atlantic croaker, and small live blue crabs. Live shrimp are fished under a popping cork or free-shrimped using a small weight and letting the shrimp swim freely. Live fish are best fished on the bottom using a slip-sinker type of rig where the fish can swim freely. The bait fish are hooked through the lips or through the top of the back behind the dorsal fin. Small blue crabs are fished on bottom and are hooked through one of the swimming legs located at the rear of the crab.



Fish-shaped plugs, both floating and shallow running, are effective over the grass flats. Shrimplike plastic worms and jigs are good and both are fished under corks or bounced along the bottom.



ARTIFICIAL BAITS

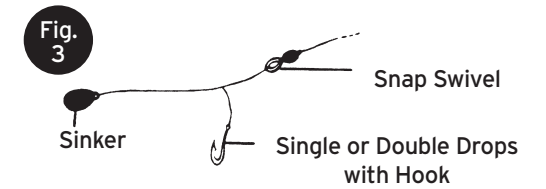


The surf provides excellent red drum fishing. The best artificial baits are the heavier spoons and slow-sinking, fish-shaped plugs. Plastic worms are also effective when bounced along the bottom.

Saltwater fly-fishing for red drum is increasing in popularity. Fly-fishers sight-cast small surface popping plugs, baitfish-type streamers or shrimp and crab imitation flies to cruising or tailing red drum. Rod lengths range from 8.5 to 9.5 feet, casting weight forward, floating line from 6 to 9 feet, with a tippet strength from 8 to 15 pounds. Once hooked, red drum are a worthy, exciting adversary.

The larger red drum, called bull reds, are best caught with natural bait. Freshly cut mullet, larger live mullet (6 - 8 inches long) and blue crab are all good bets. Both single- and double-drop bottom rigs are good. If fishing in the surf, a heavy grabbing sinker is needed to keep baits stationary on the surf bottom (below).

BOTTOM RIG



Tackle varies according to taste. Surf and pier fishermen prefer rods over 10 feet in length and stiff enough to handle the heavy terminal tackle. Reels should be large enough to handle several hundred yards of 25- to 40-pound test line, and reels should have a good drag system.

For smaller fish (less than 10 pounds), rods should be 6.5 to 8 feet long and have a medium action. Reels should be able to hold at least 100 yards of line. Line strength will vary depending on where you fish. Heavier line (17 - 25 pounds) is needed when fishing around oyster shell, rocks, or pilings. Lighter line (8 - 15 pounds) is favored when fishing the grass flats.

WHERE TO FISH

Red drum are found all along the Texas coast but tend to be concentrated in areas that harbor the food they feed on. In the bays, they can be caught on or near shallow grass flats and oyster reefs, and in deep channels. While in the surf they tend to be found in the deeper cuts along the beaches. The early-morning or late-afternoon hours tend to be the best times to catch red drum in the shallows. As the water warms, the fish tend to move to deeper water, (i.e., drop-offs, the edge of the Intra-coastal Waterway, and the deeper potholes). This also holds true during extremely cold events, but check with the local TPWD law enforcement office before fishing during these events. If the conditions warrant it, some of the deeper sites may be temporarily closed to fishing to protect the resource.