

PARASITES

Some of the trout you catch may have worms embedded in the flesh along the backbone. These “spaghetti” worms are the larval stages of tapeworms that can only reach maturity in sharks. It cannot survive in humans even if consumed raw. The worms are easily removed during filleting to make the meat more appealing.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR COOKING

The spotted seatrout is excellent table fare. Remember that care of the fish between landing and the skillet is important. Clean and place your fish on ice as rapidly as possible. The delicate meat of the trout loses quality rapidly if left unchilled, especially during warm weather.

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

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

Additional recipes can be found at local bookstores, seafood markets and grocery stores, as well as on-line.



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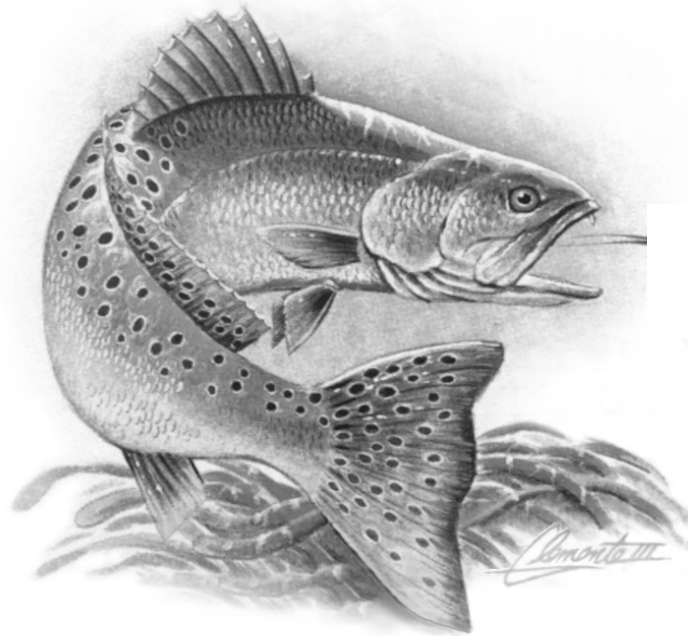
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COASTAL FISHERIES

Spotted Seatrout

IN TEXAS



The spotted seatrout (*Cynoscion nebulosus*), commonly called speckled trout, is one of the most popular sport fish along the Texas coast. It occurs in the western Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, ranging from Massachusetts to the Yucatán peninsula. This fish is a member of the drum family (*Sciaenidae*) and is a “first cousin” to the Atlantic croaker, red drum, black drum and sand seatrout. Its abundance, willingness to hit natural and artificial baits, and fine eating qualities make the species extremely popular with rod-and-reel anglers.

SPAWNING

Sexual maturity is attained at two years of age, and eggs number from 100,000 in small fish to over 1 million in larger females. Spawning occurs inside the bays over seagrass beds, where the newly hatched young find food and shelter. Research indicates that fish spawn sometime between dusk and dawn. Spotted seatrout have a protracted spawning season that lasts from late spring to early fall. Two-, three- and four-year-old fish make up the bulk of the spawning population.

GROWTH

The growth rate of spotted seatrout differs among males and females, with females growing faster:

AGE	MALE	FEMALE
1	9 inches	8 inches
2	14 inches	17 inches
3	17 inches	20 inches
4	18 inches	23 inches
5	18 inches	24 inches
6	19 inches	25 inches
7	19 inches	26 inches
8	20 inches	27 inches
9	21 inches	27 inches
10	21 inches	28 inches

Anglers long ago recognized that most large spotted seatrout caught are females and appropriately called them “sow” trout. They commonly live to be 9 to 10 years of age and can reach lengths of more than 30 inches.

The record trout taken by rod and reel in Texas measured 37.25 inches and weighed 15.6 pounds. Before your fishing trip, be sure to check regulations on bag, possession and size limits.

FEEDING

Spotted seatrout are opportunistic carnivores whose feeding habits vary with size. Small trout feed primarily on small crustaceans. Medium-sized trout feed on shrimp and small fish. Large fish feed almost exclusively on other fishes such as croaker, mullet, pinfish, pigfish and menhaden.

MOVEMENTS

Spotted seatrout are relatively non-migratory with little interbay movement. Most movement seems to be in response to water temperature and spawning. They are most common in the shallow bays during spring and summer. As water temperatures decline during fall, fish move into deeper bay waters, such as dredged boat harbors and channels, or offshore to the Gulf of Mexico. The number of fish entering the Gulf varies from year to year depending on the severity of the winter. As water temperatures warm in spring, the fish return to the shallows of the primary and secondary bays.

During periods of low rainfall and runoff, large numbers of trout often move into deeper rivers and bayous as salinities increase within these areas.



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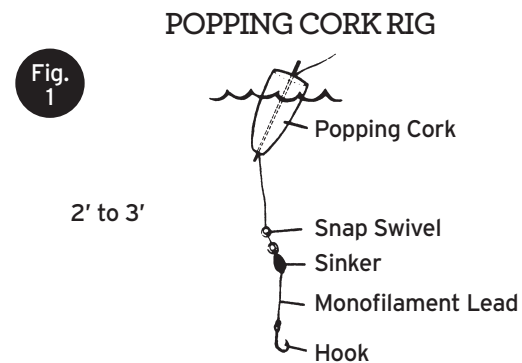
HOW TO CATCH

Experienced trout anglers have their own preferences of bait, tackle, location, etc. for catching fish. The following techniques are offered primarily for the novice with the expectation that use of the suggestions as a starting point will lead to the development of his or her own method for catching trout.

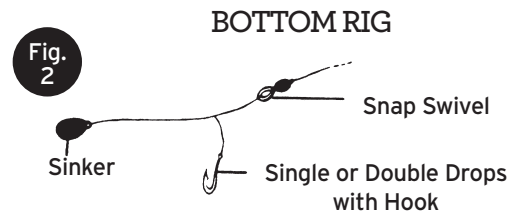
Any light to medium-action rod and reel combination is appropriate since the majority of spotted seatrout caught are in the range of two to three pounds. Equipment designed for use in saltwater is essential because of the corrosive nature of seawater.

The most popular terminal tackle for spotted seatrout is the popping cork rig (Fig. 1). The best bait for catching trout is live shrimp and croaker. Other live fish such as mullet and pinfish, as well as dead shrimp, can also be effective. Best results can be achieved by popping the cork periodically. Vary the retrieve, frequency of popping and the depth of bait until you find action.

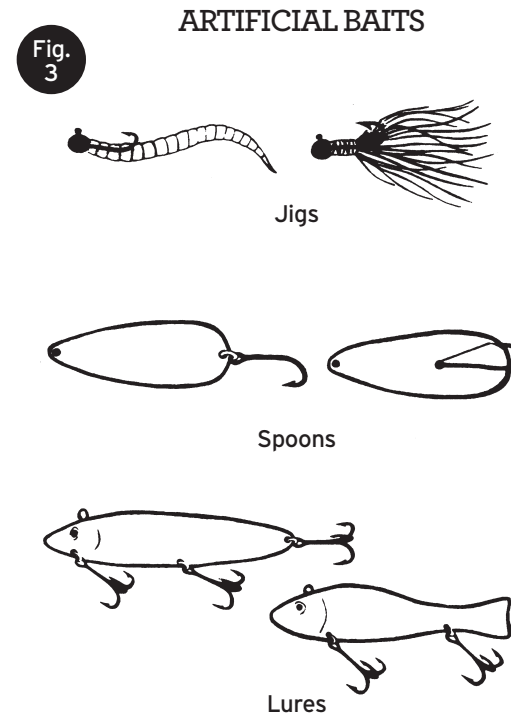
If the cork is removed and the sinker is replaced with a very small weight, you have a "free shrimping" rig. The same types of bait can be used. This method is effective when drift fishing from a boat or when fishing in areas with strong tidal flow. The bait should be allowed to drift freely in water. Adjust the weight of sinker and amount of line out to move the bait up or down in the water until fish are found.



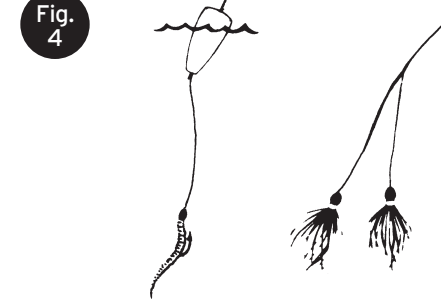
A conventional bottom rig may be used when trout are found to be feeding near the bottom (Fig. 2).



Artificial baits are effective for catching trout year-round. Although many types and styles of artificial baits exist, generally they can be classified in three ways: jigs, spoons and fishlike lures (Fig. 3).



Jigs may be fished singly or in pairs, either with or without the use of a cork (Fig. 4).



They are very effective fished under lights at night when trout congregate to feed. Jigs fished with or without a popping cork over seagrass flats are also effective. Try them without corks in deep guts or channels. Vary the action, depth fished and lure color. Hot pink, root beer, dark red and white are good colors.

Spoons are very effective, particularly during the warmer months. Silver is probably the best color. Vary the speed and depth of retrieve, as well as the weight and size of spoon. A bucktail (available at most tackle retailers) fastened to the spoon with the hook or a bucktail and hook trailed 12 inches behind the spoon is often successful.

Try the fishlike lures during the cooler months, although they can produce any time. They are especially good fished very slowly, during cold weather. When fishing shallow water during cold weather, some anglers move the point of line attachment from on top of the lure head to the tip of the snout to permit a slower retrieve while still keeping the lure off the bottom. Again, vary the retrieve, size, color and weight. Floating lures have recently become popular with anglers stalking large trout in shallow water during the warm months. The movement of the lure at the surface seems to be especially enticing to trout.

WHERE TO FISH

Where to fish is just as important as the proper bait and technique. During warm weather, fish shallow areas early in the morning and late in the evening. During the heat of the day, move to deeper areas such as the dropoffs around grass flats, channels or around oyster reefs. During moderate weather, the fish may remain in shallow water a greater portion of the day.

During very cold weather, try the deep rivers, harbors and channels. Generally, these deep areas are best after a "norther" has subsided and clearing skies are associated with rising temperatures. Boat anglers watch for groups of feeding gulls during summer and fall. Schools of trout chase shrimp or small fish to the surface, which attracts the gulls. Action while fishing under the birds can be intense with the feeding trout taking almost any bait.

Many anglers watch and "sniff" for a slick when searching for trout. Yes, you can smell trout! They often regurgitate when excited (as during feeding) and the oils from partially digested food rise to the surface to make a slick. The odor can be described as being similar to watermelon or freshly mowed grass. Other fish can be "smelled," but a practiced nose can tell the difference.

A visit to a local fishing camp, bait stand or tackle shop can often provide specific information on what to use and when and where to use it within the particular area of the coast that you plan to fish.

