

## Catching Dinner

By

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We have a rule of thumb on *Out of Bounds* when it comes to fishing. We don't bring aboard fish that are big enough to have an oar jammed down their throat. We didn't come up with this handy rule of thumb through experience, fortunately. It just seems to make a lot of sense to us. It's a new rule, but I think we'll stick with it.

When we're sailing, we aren't actually very active fisherman. We troll a handline off the stern of the boat. A handline is the ultimate in simplicity when it comes to fishing. It's basically just fishing line attached to a wooden "handle." This means no expensive rods or reels. It also means less equipment to store.

Here's how we made our handline. Starting at the all important hook end of things, we attach a pretty hefty hook or lure/hook combination to about 40 feet of 100-pound test fishing line. We attach this to 80 feet of ¼" nylon line. At this point we attach the line to a planer. The planer keeps your lure beneath the water. The other end of the planer gets attached to an additional 40 feet of line. This can be adjusted - less line makes the planer (and your lure) stay shallower and more line will cause the planer (and lure) to go deeper. This line is then secured to our homemade handle. A rubber snubber (surgical hose) tied near the end of the line makes a foot and a half to two foot of slack in the line. This helps to take some of the strain off of the line when the fish strikes. The line off of the snubber is cleated off. We happen to have a cleat about eight feet forward of the stern that we use. The handle is a piece of plywood cut into an "H" and is all that is needed to wind-up the fishing line.

To begin fishing, we toss the hook/lure into the water while we unwind line from around the handle. When we get to the planer, we hold onto it, while we cleat off

the snubber. Next we must set the planer. By holding about two feet of line on either side of the planer, we lower the planer and drop it in the water. The planer should sink down under the surface. This may take a bit of practice, but is fairly easy to do. We can put out a line on both sides of the boat.

For trolling we usually use an artificial lure. We have a variety of lures in our tackle box. We really don't know much about lure selection, but we have learned a few things. When we are in really clear water, bright colored lures – pink, orange, yellow - seem to work best. In murky waters, we use silver or blue. When we're in an area where we might catch something like a tuna, a dolphin fish (mahi mahi) or a similar fish, we usually use a squid type lure. Spoons seem to work well for mackerel. But I've heard that if you're sailing through an area where there are hungry fish, they'll strike on just about anything. Then you can save your lures and simply attach a bit of yarn or some aluminum foil.

When our metal lures start to look a bit worn, we give them a fresh sparkle by applying a coat of gold or silver glitter nail polish. You can buy a bottle for a buck or two and revive a whole tackle box full of lures. Tom's says this is what happens to the world of fishing when you live aboard with three females.

Once the sails are set and we've settled into our routines of the day, I'll usually decide to throw the handline out. Then I intensely watch it for five minutes, sure that we'll hook a fish any second. Then I lose interest and tend to check on the line every half hour or so.

When we hook a fish, the planer pops up to the surface and we know it's time to reel the fishing line in. We leave the snubber cleated to the boat, while we wind the fishing line around the handle and someone readies the net.

The other day we reeled in a plump cero (I simply called it "dinner"). Naturally we caught it just as we were coming off endless depths, over the wall, and onto soundings. On the one hand, this is generally a great place to fish, as you're almost sure to catch something. On the other hand, catching a fish here tends to distract you from more important things such as keeping your boat (your home, your family and all of your possessions) off of the reef.

Fortunately, we have a great way to deal with fish that we reel in. We pour a small shot of booze into their gills. They're instantly dead (Tom likes to think they go out happy), with no flopping around throwing fish slime everywhere. It's much better than clubbing them and getting fish blood everywhere too. A big, flopping fish on deck also tends to distract you, so humanely killing the fish quickly lets you get back to that important chore of navigation. Tom's tip on dealing with the fresh catch is to clean it as soon as possible. He says that the sooner you clean, the better the taste.

So there we were with dinner and we had safely made it inside the reef. I got out my favorite cookbook, *The Cruising Chef Cookbook* by Michael Greenwald to thumb through some fish recipes. This cookbook isn't just a compilation of great recipes; it's actually one of the funniest books I've ever read. And it gives advice on not just cooking, but storing food and all sorts of nautical tips. It also has some handy advice on fishing. As I'm paging through to the fish recipes, I come across one of Greenwald's tips, on "catching sharks."

I read that "Sharks, even small ones, don't like being caught and have difficulty with the concept of being dead. A blow on the top of their head kills them but does not eliminate the possibility that a "dead" shark won't suddenly lunge out and ruin your day. Their incredibly durable nervous system makes them dangerous for a long time. Jam an oar down their throat so they can't bite you."

That's when I decided that if a fish was big enough to have an oar jammed down their throat, maybe we shouldn't bring it aboard in the first place. Dinner, by the way, was delish!