

# **Take the Bait**

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By

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King mackerel should be the main focus for most anglers this time of year. Even die hard inshore anglers get a chance at the king fish when they move in near the beaches to feed on an abundance of bait fish. The King and Spanish mackerel that invade our coast line in the spring and fall are one of the six families of fishes that are considered the pelagic group. Other members of the pelagic group include the cero mackerel, wahoo, cobia, dolphin, tripletail, sailfish, swordfish and the white and blue marlin. All pelagics live in the water column and don't associate to the bottom like grouper or snapper. Kingfish can grow up to 2 feet during their first year and have a lifespan of up to 25 years. Big kings are commonly referred to as smokers because of their ability to make fast long runs after being hooked that can leave the drag systems melted on inferior tackle.

Preferred live baits are blue runners, cigar minnows, ballyhoo, threadfin herring, sardines, mullet and ladyfish. You can also troll hardware like king spoons and diving lures. Spread your offering throughout the water column by either using drone planers or downriggers. One of my favorite ways to catch kings is to find a good patch of hard bottom that is holding some bait and anchor up and set out a chum block or two and free line some live baits suspended under balloons tied to the leader about 10 feet above the bait. Keep the drags set to about a half a pound of pressure and when the balloon pops grab the rod and hang on.

The most common method of fishing live baits is to use a stinger rig which consists of a small barrel swivel connected to about 18 to 20 inches of No. 4 wire and a 1.0 or 2.0 long shanked gold mustad hook. Next use a short piece of wire to attach a No. 2.0 or 3.0 treble hook to the shank of the gold hook so the wire loop can't slip past the barb. The whole rig should be about 24 inches long when completed. Put the gold hook through the

nostrils of your bait and put one barb of the treble hook into the side of the bait. Kingfish hit baits at incredible speeds and skyrocket in the air and quite often just one single hook from the treble will be stuck in their head. That is why it is so important to keep a light drag setting on your reels because there really isn't that much keeping you hooked up to the fish. Gulf to Bay Bait and Tackle at 6920 Gulf Blvd, St. Pete Beach, (727) 367-4756, has all the kingfish tackle you need including pre-made stinger rigs.