

SPECKLED TROUT BLUEPRINT



THE WHERE

You'll discover exactly where to find feeding speckled trout in every season



THE WHAT

You'll know exactly what lures and bait to use for every scenario, depth, and type of area



THE WHEN

You'll discover the best tides, times, moon phases, and temps to target trout in your area



THE HOW

You'll see exactly how the pros approach a new spot, how to present your bait for maximum strikes, and how to land bigger trout

THIS 4-STEP SPECKLED TROUT FORMULA
IS PROVEN TO WORK ANYWHERE TROUT LIVE

Table of Contents

<i>Module 1: Know Your Adversary</i>	<i>5</i>
Module 1	5
The Big Idea	5
Overview	5
Sea Trout Anatomy	6
Spatial Awareness	7
Trout Habits & Hunting Grounds	7
Habits & Behavior	8
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Module 2: Seasonal Trout Tips</i>	<i>9</i>
Module 2	9
Overview	9
Habitat Range	9
Winter Trout	10
Summer Trout	11
High Water Temperatures	11
Fish Early	11
Deeper Flats & Beaches	11
Docks At Night	11
Spring & Fall Trout	12
Finding Feeding Zones	12
Avoiding Dead Zones	13
Google Maps & Murky Water	13
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Module 3: Tides & Feeding Trout</i>	<i>15</i>
Module 3	15
Overview - Tide Tips	15
The Rule of Thirds	15
1st Third (Low)	15
2nd Third (Middle)	16
3rd Third (Upper)	16
Take Advantage of Tides	17

Warmer Water	17
Cooler Water	17
Summer Water	17
Finding Feeding Trout (Tides)	18
Incoming Tides in Cooler Temps	18
Incoming Tides in Warmer Temps	18
Outgoing Tides in Cooler Temps	18
Outgoing Tides in Warmer Temps	18
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	<i>18</i>
Module 4: Best Trout Tackle & Rigs	19
Module 4	19
Overview	19
Best All-Around Spin Setup	19
Best All-Around Casting Setup	20
Heavy-Duty Trout Outfit	21
Rod/Reel for Topwater Plugs	21
If I Could Only Have Two Rods	22
Best Fishing Lines	23
Leader Lines	24
Float Rig	25
Carolina Rig	26
Surface Plugs	27
Suspending Plugs	28
<i>** Pro-Tip **</i>	<i>28</i>
Sinking Plugs	29
Texas-Rigged Soft Baits	29
Outside the Box Lures	31
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	<i>31</i>
Module 5: Cast & Retrieve Tips	32
Module 5	32
Overview On 3 Casting Types	32
Blind Casting	32
Sight Casting	33
Smart Casting	33
Natural Retrieve	33
Working a Shrimp Bait	33
Working a Dragging Bait	34
Working a Swim Bait	34

Erratic/Wounded Retrieve	34
Hard Bait	34
Soft Bait	35
Dead Sticking	35
Skip Casting Tips	36
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	<i>36</i>
Bonus Module	37
Bonus Module	37
How To Position Yourself To Get More Hookups	37
Sun & Wind Position	37
Positioning Yourself	38
Drifting for Trout	38
Gator Trout Tips	38
Best Time Of The Year	38
Best Lures & Colors	38
Go-To Gator Trout Lures	39
Trout On Demand “TOD”	41
Carolina Rig	41
Tandem Rig	41
State Specific Tips	42
Texas Tips	42
Louisiana Tips	43
Georgia & Carolina Tips	43
Alabama & Mississippi	43
The C.A. Method: Pre-Trip Planning	44
Weather & Water Temps	44
Tides - GPS Real Tide App	44
Nautical Charts & Satellite Maps	44
Pre-Rigging Gear	45
<i>What You Really Need To Know</i>	<i>45</i>
Bonus Pictures	46

If you want to see the entire video-based interactive Trout Mastery course, go here for a special book buyers only offer:

www.SaltStrong.com/TMC

Module 1

Know Your Adversary

The Big Idea

- The course will cover the following:
 - What makes trout tick
 - The trout's uncanny ability for spatial awareness
 - Their seasonal habitats
 - Where to find trout from deep water to shallow water
 - The effect of tide height and flow on trout
 - The "Rule of Thirds"
 - The right equipment to catch big trout
 - Lure presentations and "Smart Casting"
 - Retrieve disciplines
 - Stealthy approach
 - Gator trout tips
 - Moon, salinity and water temperature preferences
 - Iconic lure brands
- In this course we will use the terms "Trout", "Sea Trout", "Specs" and "Speckled Sea Trout" interchangeably - they are all the same fish for our purposes

Overview

- This module will give you a basic understanding of what makes trout tick
 - Where they live
 - What their life cycle is
 - What their diet is
 - Their anatomy

Sea Trout Anatomy

- Sea trout's eyes are set on top of its head (Fig. 1.1)
- The body is really a suit of camouflage with spots running the length of the body designed to break its outline up
- The mouth is underslung with gripping fang teeth (Fig. 1.2)
- A large head tapers down to a small tail, indicating this fish is not an overly powerful swimmer - this demonstrates the fact that the sea trout is an ambush predator
- Trout are not migratory fish - they do not travel far from where they are first spawned (no more than 5-6 miles typically)
- A location that has proved productive in the past, will usually always be productive (provided there are no water quality issues)
- Trout can live up to 15 years
- Spawning period runs from March to the end of September with the bigger females spawning every other week
- Sea trout are found on the coast from the upper Chesapeake right around into Mexico (Fig. 1.4)
- In the Winter months, trout will lay in deeper temperature refuges (power plants, deep turning basins in ports, deeper backwater creeks and canals, the Intracoastal channel)
- Spring and Fall are the ideal times to target trout when the water temperature is in their ideal range of 62° - 80°, targeting them from 1' - 6' depths
- All trout, especially bigger trout, have uncanny spatial awareness - they feel pressure from a great distance. This is because they are ambush predators, sitting still, awaiting their prey, so they are not distracted by their own movement



Fig. 1.1



Fig. 1.2



Fig. 1.3



Fig. 1.4

Spatial Awareness

- Spatial awareness is a key trait big sea trout have, especially in shallow water
- Because they sit still awaiting to ambush prey, they are very aware of poor casts, trolling motors, crunching push poles, other fish spooking into their zone
- Trout are looking up all the time and can see 15° off the water if they are in less than 2 feet of water - this means they can typically see up to 3/4 cast distance away
- If you want to catch big trout, you *must* be quiet

Trout Habits & Hunting Grounds

- Trout are not migratory and are typically found within a 2-5 miles radius of their birthplace
- Once you understand the habitat trout are found in, you can take that knowledge and place it in any fishery (location) and use it to find trout
- The following are typical types of trout habitats:
 - Broken up seagrass and sand bottom
 - Oyster bars along shorelines
 - Deeper water close by
- A flat of varying depth with structure is the ideal trout habitat
- The best trout fisheries will have a big grass flat adjacent to some deeper water relief (Fig. 1.5)
- Sea trout prefer to inhabit high-salinity zones - areas with lots of turtle or eel grass. This gives them cover and camouflage and protects them from predatory birds
- Sandy potholes are a form of structure trout love to 'hunt' in
- Oyster bars are another great type of structure that hold sea trout. (Fig. 1.6).
- Oyster bars are typically found off points of mangrove islands and in little cuts
- When looking for the perfect sea trout habitat on an online map, look for the following:
 - A vast grass flat with high-salinity (ample tide flush)
 - Deep water nearby
 - Other structure on the flat to attract them
- In areas with little to no tidal flow, any current will be wind driven. Like a lake, some of the micro organisms baitfish feed upon will be pushed by the wind, so baitfish will follow accordingly. For this reason, trout tend to be over in the lee side of islands but on the windy side of the general area



Habits & Behavior

- All trout are mid-water to surface strikers
- Juvenile trout tend to school more than gator trout and are less discriminate about what they eat. Juvenile trout will eat anything, which is why they are so easy to catch
- Mature gator trout are looking for a single, large protein source per day
- While juvenile trout congregate in schools, gator trout are more solitary, often hunting at night
- Gator trout are cannibalistic and eat juvenile trout
- Trout tend to congregate in class-size (fish of a similar length together)
- Gator trout are typically found in very shallow or very deep structure oriented water
- The opportunities to catch repeat fish are somewhat diminished after you catch a “gator” in very shallow water on beautiful weather conditions, so moving a bit will help. But prior to a front with upset weather or in a little deeper water scenario, you can remain right in the same spot and continue to catch them

What You Really Need To Know

- Trout are the most numerous apex seagrass flats predator
- Trout are mid-water to surface strikers that prefer the low-light conditions of pre-dawn, dawn, sunset and into the evening. Trout will rise out of the grass during these times, becoming a little more careless
- Low-light includes overcast cloudy days as well, especially if it's a bit breezy. All of these conditions affect light penetration and give the big speckled trout an advantage
- Bigger trout have a preference for fin-fish
- Juvenile and gator trout are rarely found together
- Like all species, a food source must be present in a location for it to be productive for trout
- Generally speaking female trout live longer and therefore are larger. Specimens over 24” are mostly all females. Sea trout are also a member of the “drum” family and the males make an audible drumming sound during the spawn to connect with females. They also do this drumming when distressed after being caught
- If a cold front rolls in and drops water temp by 8 to 10 plus degrees, the trout will likely leave the shallow water flats but return on the warm up post-front. During the Winter months, start fishing a deeper zone in the morning (e.g. channel) then target the skinny flats later in the day when the water has had time to warm up a few degrees

To see the Trout Mastery course's video footage, check out the book buyers only special: www.SaltStrong.com/TMC

Module 2

Seasonal Trout Tips

Overview

- The easiest time to target sea trout is the Spring and Fall in ideal water temperatures
- In the Wintertime, the places to target trout include channels, residential canals, rivers and creeks
- In the Spring and Fall, look for shallow grass flats, oyster bars, potholes
- In the Summer, you'll want to target deep grass flats, beaches and near-shore wrecks

Habitat Range

- The habitat for sea trout ranges across the following:
 - Healthy seagrass flats
 - Submerged rock piles
 - Intracoastal channels
 - Near-shore wrecks
 - Rivers
 - Creeks
 - Beaches
 - Prop-scars
 - Oyster bars
 - Pot holes

Winter Trout

- The Winter months encompass late-December through early-March, but particularly January and February
- Best places to target trout in the Winter are:
 - Intracoastal waterways
 - Rivers & creeks
 - Power-plant outflows
 - Residential docks & canals
- During the Winter months and any cold fronts, trout are looking for areas with a temperature refuge - they are looking for warmer water
- Their appetite will not be that great so scenting your baits with Pro-Cure is a great ploy
- Micro-baits fished close to the bottom will yield the best results
- Trout are cold-blooded so when the water temperature changes, their metabolism and feeding patterns change
- The lower tolerable temperature range for trout in Florida is about 58°, although they can tolerate colder, given time to acclimate
- In the Winter months there is typically a pressure or front change about every 5-7 days
- There is not a lot of baitfish on the flats in the Winter, so trout will eat Jerk Shads in root beer, motor oil, watermelon colors. Big bass worms can also be successfully fished during this time
- Larger mullet will come onto the flats like the trout to warm themselves and they will be turning up shrimp, pipe seahorses, etc., which the trout will feed on
- Walking a Top Dog or Top Dog Jr. at this time can also be productive
- There is no need at all to wake up at 5am in the Winter months to go and catch sea trout pre-front
- Before the water gets cold, the fish may have moved from one of the areas mentioned above, to a nearby flat
- Pre-front will have winds clocking around from the Southwest to a more Northwesterly pattern
- Trout will be aggressive during this time, being compelled to eat as they sense a change coming due to the direction of the wind and the change in the barometric pressure
- A day or two before a cold front in the Winter months is the ideal time to target big sea trout
- Topwaters and bigger Jerk Shads are great options during this time
- On the day of the cold front and especially a day or two later, the trout will not be on the flat as the water temperature has dropped to rival the colder air temps
- At this point you'll go back to the locations mentioned above that are adjacent to those flats

Post-Front

- About the third day after the cold air has settled in, a warming trend will begin to occur and the fish will leave these deeper areas and start coming back up onto the flats
- They are looking to warm up from the sun, but will not be on the flats in the morning as it's still too cold
- By noon they will be up on the flats, but not feeding - their main agenda at this point is to warm with the sun
- About the 4th or 5th day prior to the next front arriving (remember these fronts come in cycles), the fish are getting hungry and looking to feed. At this point we're back into the pre-front mode
- Catching trout in the Winter depends on your ability to get in tune with this cycle
- During extended periods of cold weather, trout will become acclimated to the cold temperatures and will feed and behave as they would pre-front
- While they may still be aggressive you will need to work your baits very slowly, creeping the bait along the bottom

Summer Trout

- Many people are not targeting trout in the Summer as they target other species
- Fishing after thunderstorms in the Summer months definitely helps anglers catch more trout, redfish, and in South Florida, more snook due to the temperature drop usually associated with these storms

High Water Temperatures

- The biggest challenge with Summer fishing is high water temperatures which typically means a lower oxygen content in the water
- Avoid fishing in the middle of the day and do not look for trout on shallow flats during the day in Summertime

Fish Early

- Fish early! Pre-dawn (5am - 8:30am) hours are the best bet as this will be the coolest part of the day after the water has had all night to cool down

Deeper Flats & Beaches

- During daylight hours, target trout in deep flats closer to inlets, passes and beaches
- Flats 5'-10' deep with good tidal flush are ideal
- Look for other elements in conjunction with the deeper flat, like nearby beaches, bridges, docks and residential canals
- A lot of gator trout spend summer in inlets and passes and venture out onto the beaches during the day to inhabit the swash channels
- Rock jetties are a great ambush spot for trout (Fig 2.1) as are sunken wrecks just off the beach in about 8'-12' of water

Docks At Night

- Targeting trout on docks at night (especially under lights) is very productive
- Even more so is when that dock is adjacent to an area where the water flows out of a pass
- Plastic shrimp, buck-tail jigs and topwater lures are all excellent lure choices
- Free-lined finger mullet is a great night time offering. If you decide to try artificials at night, don't discount the darker colors. They silhouette against a moonlit sky well and the big specks slurp them!



Spring & Fall Trout

- Spring and Fall (mid October through early December) are the most fruitful two seasons for targeting sea trout
- In Spring and Fall, the water temperature on most grass flats across their habitat range is ideal (mid-to-high 60's up to the mid-to-high 70's)
- At this time, the flats are alive with life. Fin-fish bait is everywhere, so the challenge becomes picking the right kinds of lures to get the trout's attention
- Look for healthy-grassed areas with lots of pelicans, terns and seagulls - these are the types of birds that feed on fin-fish
- All the lures in your tackle bag are likely in play at this time - topwaters, MirrOdines and other slow-suspenders, crankbaits, big Jerk Shads, paddle tails
- This is the easiest time of the year to catch both juvenile and gator trout. There really is not much in the way of specific techniques or approaches needed during this time of the year

Finding Feeding Zones

- The ideal place for sea trout is a shallow flat with deep water relief close by and healthy grass cover peppered with potholes (Fig. 2.2)
- Oyster bars are always a good sign as they soak up the sun at low water. When the water returns to cover the oyster bar at high tide, the oyster bar acts like a radiator, warming the water and attracting mullet and other fin-fish
- The mullet will actually become a distraction to the trout helping to cloak your pressure waves and your presence



Fig. 2.2

Avoiding Dead Zones

- The following are good clues to let you know you're likely in an unproductive zone:
 - Lack of mullet
 - Lack of predator birds
 - Lack of shore birds
 - Lack of baitfish, sharks or sting rays
 - 20 or more minutes without any action (especially if drifting)
- 90% of fish are in 10% of the water
- Do not try and push through this thinking that the fish are 100 yards further down the flat - percentages tell us there are not

Google Maps & Murky Water

- When pre-planning for an area with poorer water quality, look for places with current
- Targeting deeper zones (like bridges) where there is current is a good play. Here you can mark the baitfish on your electronics
- In the early Spring, trout will sit in 15-20' of water below these bait schools in the channels under bridges (Fig. 2.3)



What You Really Need To Know

- Winter can offer great action, especially pre-front and post-front
- You will want to target trout on the flats in pre-front conditions
- Post-front, the fish will leave the flats seeking temperature refuge in deeper water. In these scenarios, fish small baits in places like residential canals and power-plant outflows with less tide-flow
- In the Summer, fish the shallows pre-dawn and dock lights at night to beat the heat. Fish in areas with good current flow delivering cooler water (near passes and inlets, etc.)
- Spring and Fall are the best all-day steady action seasons. The water temperatures are ideal, not only for trout but for baitfish also
- March and April around the big moons are your best opportunities for the really super-sized sow trout
- Current and lower light periods trump all other factors when it comes to sea trout
- Aside from the obvious clues of mullet schools, consider the following more subtle clues that may indicate you're in a productive area:
 - The presence of flashing pinfish or fry minnows
 - The presence of sheepshead, stingrays or bonnethead sharks
 - The seagrass leaning over in the direction of the tide which indicates good flow
 - Dust-offs or surface boils from possible fleeing game fish
- Gator trout need lots of horizontal current movement in the shallows so the big moons during early Spring are great times to target them. Albeit, the after full moon period is not quite as productive as the days leading up to the full moon, but it's still an awesome tide

Want To Maximize Your Results While Saving Time?

Then order the video-based Trout Mastery course! It has everything in this book (plus more) in easy-to-use video tutorials so that you can more easily see and understand the needed tips.

Plus, you can get all your trout questions answered and see the Q&A activity from other anglers.

Learn more about it here: www.SaltStrong.com/TMC

Module 3

Tides & Feeding Trout

Overview - Tide Tips

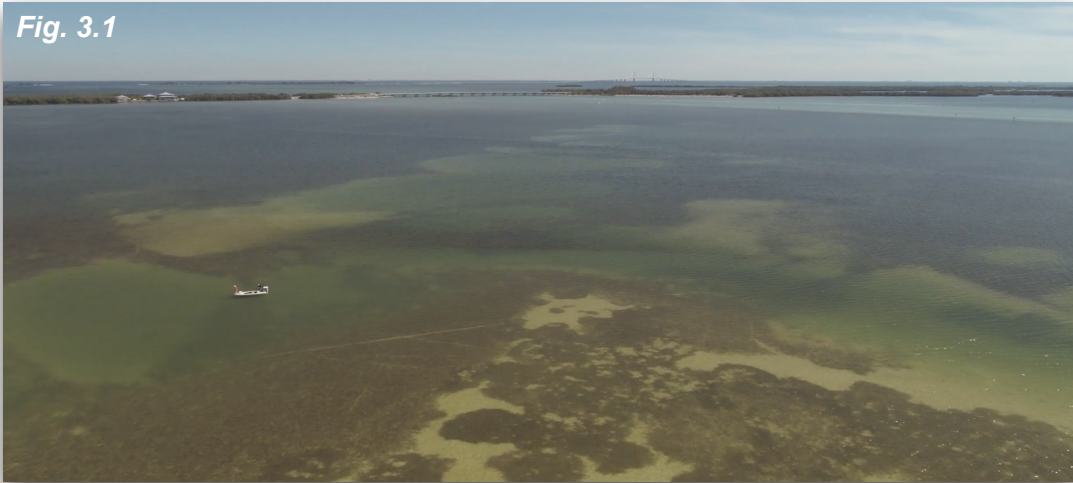
- This chapter covers tide height and current flow and how they help you predict when sea trout are going to feed
- Again, trout are ambush predators, looking for food to come to them where they can rush out and attack the bait
- In areas with more current and in low-light conditions, trout will begin to hunt, moving across the flats actively attacking other fin-fish
- If the current is strong enough, always work the lure in direction of the flow, especially in creeks or passes. On the flats, it's not as critical
- Sea trout will feed as long as they have current velocity (moving water)

The Rule of Thirds

1st Third (Low)

- This is the part of the tide where it's starting to move in
- It encompasses the last two hours of the outgoing tide OR the first two hours of the incoming tide
- During this period, the fish are more concentrated due to the lower water levels
- Target trout during this time on the drop-offs or deeper potholes on the outside edges of the flat
- The Lower Third is a great time to target sea trout
- Smaller baits are going to work better during this time, like soft plastics rigged weedless, light-weighted paddle tails
- A slightly heavier jighead should be used if fishing a drop-off
- In many cases on the Lower Third of the tide, the fish drizzle off the flat through a path of potholes or one deeper section of the flat. You will see this funnel that comes out to an oxbow of sorts (Fig. 3.1) where the fish will settle into 4-8 feet of water and ride the entire low slack part of the tide out
- In the Lower Third of the tide you can position your boat parallel to the oxbow and you can catch these trout cast after cast because they are not going anywhere

Fig. 3.1



2nd Third (Middle)

- This is the part of the tide where tidal flow is at it's highest velocity
- This time is obvious due to the increased bird and fish activity and this is the best way to determine if you are in the Middle Third of the tide. Look for diving terns, pelicans and gulls and look for the mullet to come alive and dimpling bait on the surface
- At this point in the tide, the fish are going to move from about half-way up the flat to all the way on top of the flat, sitting in sandy potholes
- At this time you can throw fast moving twitch-baits, paddle tails, quick-moving weedless Jerk Shads and topwaters
- The Middle Third is the best time to target sea trout and the time where you will get the most vicious topwater and midwater strikes
- About 2 hours after this period, things will start to slack off

3rd Third (Upper)

- This is the part of the tide where the water is at it's highest point and the tidal flow is starting to slow down again
- Because of the volume of water during the Upper Third of the tide, the area where you can fish is diluted. There's so much water at this time, the fish have too many options to disperse
- The fish and bait are just too spread out - it's the toughest time to catch sea trout
- During this time, you want to target structure - docks, completely submerged oyster bars, the smallest, shallowest potholes on the crown of the flat (the shallowest area that on low tide could almost or will be exposed)
- Portions of the flat that typically hold wading birds during low tide are great places to target trout during the Upper Third. As this portion of the flat becomes completely covered, big trout will slide up into those small yellow potholes

Take Advantage of Tides

Warmer Water

- When fishing the temperate months (late May through October) with warmer water temperatures (80° and above), fishing the incoming tide is far more productive due to the influx of cooler, oxygenated water coming up onto the flat. This is going to make the fish very active
- This incoming tide is the part of the tide the fish are looking to feed on - they are not looking to feed on the hot, de-oxygenated water falling off the flat at low tide

Cooler Water

- In the cooler months (late fall through early-mid spring) either incoming or outgoing will work
- In the very coldest portion of the year (January and February), the high, outgoing water is best
- This is because the water has come into back bays and has been warmed up on flats and oyster bars - when the tide starts to fall, they have warmer water coming to them which stimulates the bite
- Timing a falling tide with low-light at the end of the day is the perfect combination. Here you have moving water that has been warmed by the sun all day on shallow flats and oyster bars, and low-light which these predator fish love

Summer Water

- In the Summer months (especially July and August), incoming tides are great. Here you have pre-dawn incoming cool water bringing baitfish with it, coming up onto the flat with trout set up in potholes
- Throwing topwaters to these fish who are just sitting there looking up for bait is a killer approach
- During a weak tide where there is not a lot of water moving, look for areas where the wind is roughing the water up, oxygenating it and moving bait across the flat (Wind Tide)
- Taking up a position between two islands on the windward side can magnify a Wind Tide whereby the wind squeezes water through that opening and creates a channel that the fish will sit on waiting to predate
- If an island has a hard, rocky point or an oyster point, trout will often sit off these in the wind on high water. Throwing a topwater, a MirrOlure 7M, a big MirrOdine, really anything that's a floater-diver will catch really big trout
- In non-tidal areas like Mosquito Lagoon, the wind will drive micro organisms that baitfish feed on to one side of the zone in good numbers. This will cause many predator fish like sea trout to follow suit. So if you get a hard west wind in the Lagoon, it's likely the east side of the Lagoon could offer some good fishing when the wind lays down.

Want To Become A Trout Fishing Master?

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Finding Feeding Trout (Tides)

- The days preceding the full moon are typically more reliable than the two or three days after the full moon. So lunar tables are worth paying attention to, especially if they sync with a good tide
- The following is an easy guide on where to find fish on incoming and outgoing tides in warmer and cooler water

Incoming Tides in Cooler Temps

- Docks in residential canals (especially docks that are on a north-facing seawall (sun facing))
- Shallow creeks and bays in the backcountry. Here the water is warmed by the mud and oyster bars that have been soaking up heat during the day

Incoming Tides in Warmer Temps

- Pre-Dawn on the flats for the first few hours of the day on flats that get good tidal flow
- These will be places close to inlets & passes, places where the seagrass is the healthiest
- Large, sandy washouts with no color are indicative of places with good tidal flow

Outgoing Tides in Cooler Temps

- Creeks and Rivers - as the water has been warming in the backcountry and flowing out through these creeks and rivers, trout will sit in the holes in the creeks or in the drop-offs just outside the creeks, picking off fish as they swim out
- Drop-Offs - here you're looking for a funnel off the flat that dumps out into a deeper drop-off. Trout will sit here catching fish as the warmer water drains off the flat

Outgoing Tides in Warmer Temps

- Oyster Reefs and Bars - trout will sit in holes or deeper water just off these reefs picking off mullet as they fall off the reef with the outgoing water
- Wrecks - trout will sit on wrecks and submerged rock piles in parts of the Intracoastal and deeper parts of the bay
- Passes - there are big heavy trout to be found along the jetties and rock groynes of passes hanging out with the snook

What You Really Need To Know

- The Rule of Thirds is critical to understanding tide height and current flow
- The Middle and Lower Thirds are always the most productive times as the fish are the most concentrated and accessible
- The tide has to be moving for the best bite (especially in the Middle Third)
- In the Summer, fish the high, outgoing tide with sinking plugs on deeper flats in 6'-10' of water right around the passes
- As a general rule, incoming water is always best in warmer months with warmer water
- Cold water months are the best to fish outgoing tides

Module 4

Best Trout Tackle & Rigs

Overview

- This section will cover seat trout tackle and rigs. The following will be covered:
 - Rod and reel setups
 - Spinning gear
 - Casting gear
 - Line and leader requirements
 - Hook sizes
 - Lure selection
 - Fish-fighting tactics

Best All-Around Spin Setup

- A good all-round rod for fishing for trout is a medium-action 7' rod with a medium-fast tip that bends 30-35% down the blank (Fig. 4.1). This dampens the amount the fish can pull on the rod, allowing you to hold tight to the fish without tearing up their face
- The rod is rated for 1/4 - 1/2 oz lures
- A high-dollar rod is not required but a moderately-priced rod in the \$150 range is ideal
- The ideal pairing for this rod is a 2500 series reel, the smaller spool reducing contact of the line on the blank, thus increasing cast distance
- This setup will be extremely light, reducing fatigue
- A super-robust drag is not required as it would be for redfish or snook
- Ideally the reel will be sealed and corrosion-resistant
- All in, \$270 is a reasonable target price range for a spinning rod trout setup
- Steer away from lower-priced reels (\$60-\$70) due to their increased weight and lessened corrosion resistance



Fig. 4.1

Best All-Around Casting Setup

- A medium to medium-light, 6.5' - 7.5' long rod, bending about half way down the blank (Fig. 4.2)
- This rod will throw smaller lures a great distance - anything from 1/8 oz to 1/2 oz
- The shorter rod allows for more accurate casts
- An advantage of a casting rod versus a spinning rod is that line has to be “thrown” off the spool for a spinning rod, whereas on a casting rod, the line “shoots” off the spool - requiring less effort
- The average casting rod setup will weigh 3-4 oz less than it's equivalent spinning rod setup
- Casting rods allow for slower lure retrieval due to them pulling in less line than spinning reels with identical gear ratios. Slower lure retrieval is critical for trout fishing
- A good start for most fishing scenarios utilizing a casting setup would be the Falcon Low Rider Salt “Popper” rod at 7' long with a medium-action. Good choices for casting reels are the Shimano Curado, Daiwa Zillion or Daiwa Coastal Tatula and the 13 Fishing Concept A



Fig. 4.2

Heavy-Duty Trout Outfit

- The following setup is recommended for Carolina rigging to fish deeper zones like passes, jetties or bridges or if skipping up under docks or throwing to other structure
- A medium/medium-heavy to heavy-action rod paired with a 4000 series spinning reel spooled with 15-25 lb braid is ideal
- Notice the rod only bends at the top of the blank (Fig. 4.3), indicating a less forgiving rod but one that allows you to throw with a lot of velocity - great for skipping baits up underneath docks, throwing heavier lures and Carolina rigging using 3/4 oz bullet weights with a glass bead behind 20" of leader
- This setup will not cast as far as the all-round setups, but distance is not a necessity with this heavy-duty setup as you are throwing to structure
- The larger reels will have a heavier drag system, which you will need for fishing this type of scenario



Fig. 4.3

Rod/Reel for Topwater Plugs

- For throwing topwaters or the bigger suspending plugs like the Paul Browns or the MirrOlure Catch 5's, the ideal setup would be a 7' medium-heavy rod bending about 20% down the blank (Fig. 4.4) and rated for 1/4 oz to 3/4 oz lures and 12-20 lb line
- Pairing this rod with something like a Shimano Curado spooled with 16 lb mono allows you to store and unload energy of heavier plugs much easier than the medium to medium-light rods you would otherwise use on shallow flats
- If using a topwater plug, you will need a short, stiff mono leader (18" of 30#). This will keep the plug from fouling the treble hooks on your mainline during the cast



If I Could Only Have Two Rods

- For throwing plugs a 6'9" to 7' mono-spooled casting setup is best
- Anytime you're throwing a smaller treble-hook plug where you know you'll need some forgiveness, you'll want to use mono on a casting reel
- When throwing soft-plastics, especially if Texas-rigged or rigged with a little heavier wired hook, a spinning rod spooled with braid is the ideal choice
- Typically, casting rods spooled with mono and spinning rods spooled with braid are the best choices
- On spinning gear (light/med), utilize 10-15 lb braid
- If employing braid on casting gear used similarly, use 30 lb braid. Here you're looking at line diameter and the ability to control or minimize backlash

Want even more Trout Mastery info? Check out the entire Trout Mastery course in video format by going to this link:

www.SaltStrong.com/TMC

Best Fishing Lines

- Braid is preferable on spinning gear while mono is preferable on casting gear
- Because the rods used are more in the medium to medium-light ranges and longer casts are needed, 10 lb braid is the ideal sized line for spinning rods
- While the difference line-color makes is subjective, lighter-colored lines (like high-vis yellow) make it easier to track the lure in the water
- While 6-8 lb braid can be used on spinning gear to extend casting distance, this can get troublesome with tangles and wind knots
- On casting rods, treble-hooked hard-baits are often thrown, so 12-17 lb monofilament line is preferred as it gives more control when casting and is more forgiving when working the bait. The stretch inherent in the mono also helps prevent hooks from straightening when hooked into a big fish
- If no leader is required, 17 lb mono works well
- If you feel a leader is needed, then 12 lb mono tipped with 25 lb fluorocarbon works well
- If casting around cover like docks, mangroves and oyster bars, spooling a casting reel with 30 lb braid is a good idea. The 30 lb braid will still only have the equivalent line diameter to 8-10 lb mono. You will want to adjust the centrifugal brake with the casting reel to prevent the braid from rutting down onto itself on the spool. The use of braid promotes greater sensitivity
- Mustad makes an 8-core braid that is very slick, has excellent color-retention and is relatively tangle-free
- While braid will not be changed very often, you will want to completely re-spool monofilament line every 2-3 trips. This is because mono generally breaks down and gets weaker on every trip. Mono absorbs a little water, which weakens it. Also, the UV rays from the sun can break down the mono line over time. The biggest factor however, is the wear and tear the line endures from casting, moving through the environment in the water, and of course, catching fish themselves which alters the test or strength of the line.
- Ande and Berkley both make high-quality monofilament lines

Leader Lines

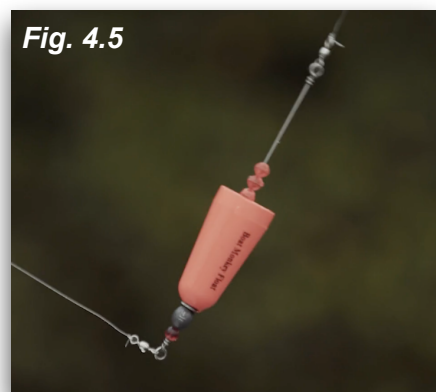
- The difference between fluorocarbon and monofilament for leader material is as follows:
 - Fluorocarbon is more expensive
 - Fluorocarbon is clearer than mono, so in the water, it has a light-refraction index closer to water than mono, which makes fluorocarbon far less visible
 - Fluorocarbon does not stretch like mono, making it more sensitive
 - Fluorocarbon is denser and sinks faster than mono, allowing baits to get deeper, where you need them faster
 - Mono is a little lighter and floats more than fluorocarbon. It is great for throwing topwater lures
 - Mono needs to be changed more often than fluorocarbon
- At the end of the day, fluorocarbon is a typically a better choice overall — although most flats fishing can be done with mono leaders and the difference in the number of bites compared to fluorocarbon leaders will be negligible
- For trout fishing, 15-20 lb leader is typically sufficient unless fishing structure or fishing areas where you know there are other species present that may cut you off
- The deeper and darker the water, the higher pound test you can use
- When fishing slow-moving fish or crab imitators in shallow pot-holes in the Winter where you need to drag the bait slowly across the bottom, a 4' length of 15 lb leader would be ideal
- When topwater fishing, you do not need a long stretch of fluorocarbon leader. In fact, mono leader would work fine. In this scenario, 12-16" of leader is ideal
- When fishing a paddle tail or a fast moving twitchbait like a MirrOdine, a 2' length of 20 lb leader (mono or fluorocarbon) will suffice. These are "chase baits" so long leader lengths are unnecessary as the fish is coming at the bait from behind
- Fluorocarbon really becomes necessary in clear, shallow, cold water, when the bait needs to be moved slowly

For all of the trout course's video footage, go here:

[**www.SaltStrong.com/TMC**](http://www.SaltStrong.com/TMC)

Float Rig

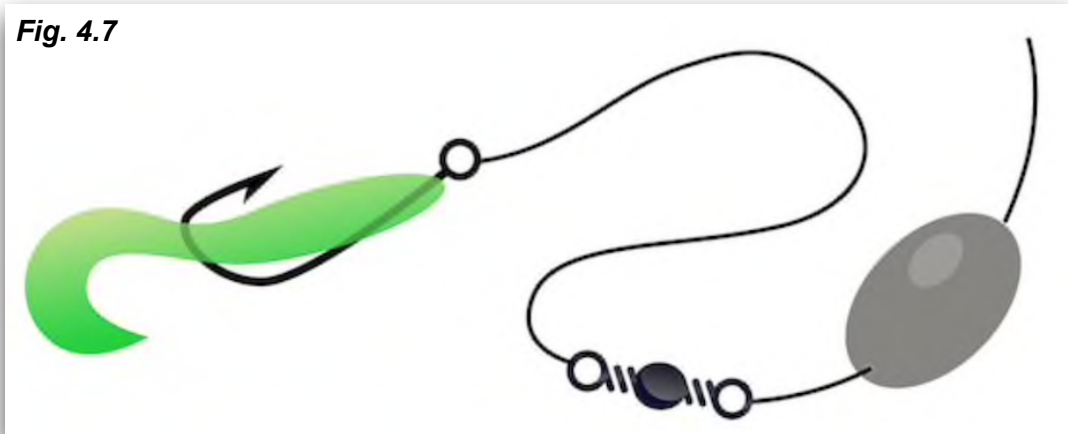
- For steady, constant action, nothing out-performs a Float Rig
- The ideal float will be cup-faced and noisy - something with “clackers” on it (Fig. 4.5)
- When fishing it, you want to pop it by twitching on the rod, wait about 3 seconds, reel up the slack then pop it again. This sounds like a feeding fish to the trout
- When you see the float disappear below the surface, reel down to load the rod tip quickly then give a long sweep of the rod and steady tension to keep the fish on all the way to the gunnel
- Ensure leader length is shorter than the depth of water you are fishing or you won't be able to provide enough action on your soft plastic lure. For example, if you are fishing the float rig in 4' of water, make sure your leader length falls between 2'-2.5'
- If your float lies horizontally on the surface instead of straight up & down, the leader length is too long
- Using this rig works very well between the hours of about 9:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. as the trout settle into deeper potholes from 2.5' to 5' deep
- When you pop the cork, the bait comes up through the water column, then gently falls back down
- The Z-Man EZ ShrimpZ (Fig. 4.6) with a healthy dose of Pro-Cure applied is a great artificial bait to use in this application
- Fish this rig on a medium-heavy 7' rod
- While this method doesn't allow you to control the size of the trout you catch, fished on a healthy flat with ample tide-flow and bird/bait activity, you will catch a lot of trout
- Use this rig predominantly when blind casting deeper water 3' or better. It's really more of a search bait technique when stealth isn't required



Carolina Rig

- The Carolina Rig uses weight to get into deeper water (Fig. 4.7)
- Tie 24" - 36" of 15 lb fluorocarbon leader to a small swivel and attach a 1/4 oz - 1/2 oz bullet weight above the swivel. Use a light wire circle hook (like a 3/0 light wire Mustad Circle Hook) to allow the bait to float in the water column
- Casting this bait good distances is easy but you will want to work it back slowly
- Use a medium to medium-heavy action rod which allows you to come tight on the fish
- Although the bullet weight will allow the retrieve through the grass easier, fishing sparser grass rather than solid grass is a better ploy to avoid hangups
- The technique here is to allow the weight to sink to the bottom, reel up the slack to keep the line tight, then shake the rod gently so the weight only just comes off the bottom. Reel up the slack and repeat
- A glass bead between the weight and the swivel will prevent the weight chafing the knot and creates a clicking noise that attracts the fish
- You do not need a heavy hook-set. Once you feel the fish strike, reel down, sweep the rod to the side and stay tight allowing the circle hook to do it's job
- Remember you have a heavier action rod here so you'll need to finesse the trout in or your may rip open their softer mouths
- This rig also works very well for catching flounder
- Z-Man baits work excellently on this rig due to their buoyant nature - if using another type of soft plastic or a live bait, you may want to consider a mono leader as mono floats more than fluorocarbon

Fig. 4.7



Surface Plugs

- Hard-plastic topwater plugs are typically the most common types of surface plugs and are one of the best search-baits a sea trout angler has due to their ability to be casted great distances
- Chrome and bone colors are usually the most productive colors for trout fishing - a great option is the MirrOlure Top Dog Jr. (Fig 4.8)
- Typically the best times to throw surface plugs are in low-light or overcast conditions and on calm water. Although if mullet are around, they can be effective at any time
- Under brighter skies, downsize your topwater plug. For example instead of a Top Dog Jr. use a Top Pup
- Ideally this would be thrown on a medium-heavy action rod with a medium-fast tip that bends about 25% down the blank
- The action you are trying to emulate when using these surface plugs is that of a swimming mullet and particularly one that looks weak and vulnerable
- Mono is preferable when fishing surface plugs due to the forgiveness in the line when the fish strikes, helping to prevent the fish tearing out the hook
- A short leader of 12"-15" tied to the plug with a loop knot is all that is needed. Too much leader material in front of the plug will weigh the nose down and negatively effect the action
- The weight of the leader is not important here - the fish only has eyes for the plug
- Consider your height when choosing a rod for the "walk-the-dog" technique, as the rod tip needs to be pointed down with moderate downward-jerks to achieve the desired action
- A regular rhythm is the way to start the action, but when a trout strikes the plug, allow the plug to sit there and settle for a few seconds, which makes the trout think it has stunned the bait. From here reel up any slack, walk the bait another couple of times and stop it again. This is the point where the trout will usually come back to finish the job
- An erratic, inconsistent retrieve is the best way to draw strikes. For example, walk the bait moderately fast for a few seconds, then reel it straight for a second or two, restarting again with a slower walk for a further few seconds and then reel straight again



Suspending Plugs

- MirrOlure makes an awesome suspending twitchbait called the MirrOdine XL, or the 27MR (Fig. 4.9)
- A medium-action rod with a medium-fast tip, bending at about 30-35% of the blank is the appropriate rod choice here, allowing for a very long cast and enough forgiveness to prevent the hook from being pulled out of the fish's face or to straighten out the hook
- The MirrOdine XL, XXL, Paul Brown or Tidal Surge baits are excellent options to help eliminate catching small fish
- These baits are slow-sinkers, falling at a rate of about 6" every second
- Fish these baits on flats from 2-3' deep
- Twitching the bait faster and keeping the rod tip higher will allow you to fish this bait in as little as 1' of water
- The technique here is a twitch-twitch-pause. Twitch the rod 2-3 times, then let the bait fall - it will flash as it falls. Reel in the slack then repeat this technique. Don't be afraid to change the rhythm
- Swimming the bait straight through the water then giving a down-twitch is also a good technique
- A great tip to avoid excess line on the water is to slow the line down with your finger on the cast. This prevents you having a lot of line laying in the water that you need to come tight on, which usually by the time you do, the bait has sunk to the bottom and you are fouled on the weeds
- Big suspending lures like the MirrOdine XL and the Paul Brown Fat Boy do a good job mimicking pigfish and croaker profiles. Utilize these two lures after a cold front



**** Pro-Tip ****

- When conditions are bright with lots of blue sky and you feel like your lure has too much flash, take some sandpaper and scuff up the sides of the bait, dampening the amount of flash

Sinking Plugs

- Sinking plugs work very well on deeper flats in the Summer and also on shallower flats or residential canals in the Winter time
- Tidal Surge (Maniac Mullet) make excellent sinking plugs (Fig. 4.10) in both fast sink (for deeper, Summer flats) and slow sink (for shallower flats) varieties. These baits have a flat face, allowing for a subsurface walk-the-dog action.
- Paul Brown also makes excellent sinking plugs like the Fat Boy (Fig. 4.11)
- These baits are typically about 1/2 oz and work very well on medium-action rods which have enough forgiveness
- After casting, reel the slack up quickly to prevent the bait from sinking into the grass, then employ the same upward twitch-twitch-pause technique as mentioned in the suspending plugs section. This is a faster sinking bait so do not pause too long to keep the bait out of the grass
- Another great technique is to employ a downward twitch throwing line back towards the bait, which promotes a nice wide walking action



Texas-Rigged Soft Baits

- Big 5-6" soft plastics are extremely popular choices amongst speckled trout fishermen
- Senko-styled worms and Jerk Shads draw excellent strikes
- The Z-Man Trout Trick is a wonderful choice
- Jerk Shads are typically denser and sink a little slower which works well
- Tie a weighted hook with a loop knot onto a 30" length of 20 lb leader. Use a weighted hook a little larger than what you would ideally need (like a 1/16 oz to 1/8 oz, 4/0-5/0) which is used to help the firm hook-set required and also allows the bait to fall horizontally through the water column which slows the fall. Mustad Grip Pin hooks are excellent as they have a node that works to grip the bait (Fig. 4.12)
- Using oversized rigging hooks is critical so that you can overcome the soft plastic bait from blocking the hook gap. This is very important when using larger soft-plastic 5" Jerk Shads
- The rigging technique is as follows:
 - Come through the middle of the nose of the bait and bring the hook out on the underside of the bait about 1/4" from the nose (Fig. 4.13)
 - Slide the bait up over the weighted section of the hook and over the node (Fig. 4.14)
 - Measure where the hook should come out of the bait (so the profile is straight) and gently push the hook up through the belly of the bait until the hook protrudes out of the back of the bait (Fig. 4.15), ensuring the hook comes out dead center of the back (Fig. 4.16) otherwise the bait will helicopter unnaturally on the retrieve ruining your presentation
 - Gently pulling the bait up and slightly burying the hook point in the back of the bait will make the rig weedless. This is great for skipping the bait up under mangroves
 - After casting, reel up the slack quickly to get the action started, allow it a moment to begin to fall, then twitch it once. Reel up the slack and twitch again

- Because this bait is rigged weedless, it doesn't matter if it falls into the grass but ideally you want the bait to dart around just above the grass
- This works great in depths from 8" to 8', adjusting your weighted hook per the depth being fished
- During the Summer when the fish are more active, you can work it faster using a walk-the-dog action. In the Winter when the fish are more lethargic, let the bait fall into the holes then lift it two-three times before letting it fall again
- The cadence of the retrieve is predicated on the temperature of the water and/or the mood of the fish
- Colors that match the bottom, like Root Beer and Watermelon Red work very well and should be worked near the bottom
- Lighter colors like Pearl White or Green Lantern mimic bait fish more and should be worked higher in the water column

Fig. 4.12



Fig. 4.13



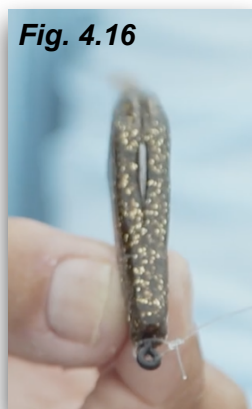
Fig. 4.14



Fig. 4.15



Fig. 4.16



Outside the Box Lures

- Soft plastic topwaters, plastic frogs and pairing a topwater plug with a small, slow-sinking fly are all examples of “Outside the Box” lures
- Pairing a topwater plug with a fly (Fig. 4.17), is done by removing the rear treble hook and tying about 20” of 15 lb fluorocarbon leader connected on the other end to the fly. This mimics a weaker bait swimming behind the topwater. As the plug walks-the-dog, the ‘shrimp’ hops along behind it
- For this technique, a 7’ medium-heavy rod with a medium-fast tip rigged on mono works best, walked like a regular walk-the-dog action or even popped, giving the fly time to fall
- This is a great option in depths 2’-4’

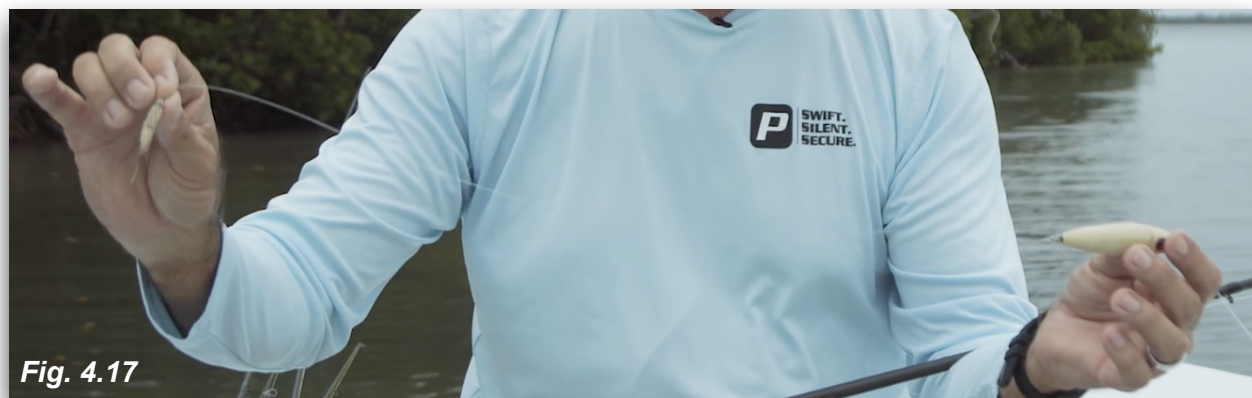


Fig. 4.17

What You Really Need To Know

- You need to use rod actions that are very forgiving to prevent tearing the trout’s face up - think medium action rods for trout
- The water depth will determine what type of lure you need to fish
- In clear water, use more natural colored lures whether you are ‘matching the hatch’ or sea bottom. If you are dealing with off color water or turbidity, utilize bolder colors like chartreuse, pink or black. Making your lure stand out by having a chartreuse tail or a red head works great too

Want To Maximize Your Trout Fishing Time?

Check out the full video-based Trout Mastery course which has everything in this book and more in professional video tutorials so that you can easily understand the best trout fishing tactics.

Learn more about it here: www.SaltStrong.com/TMC

Module 5

Cast & Retrieve Tips

Overview On 3 Casting Types

- This module covers:
 - Blind casting
 - Sight casting
 - Smart casting
 - Skip casting
 - Natural retrieves
 - Erratic / wounded retrieves
 - Dead sticking

Blind Casting

- Blind casting means you have no idea where the fish are
- When prospecting for fish using this technique, use a setup that will promote long casts, a dense, heavy bait that will afford a long cast and target the portion of the boat from 10 o'clock to 2 o'clock and fish that zone. This is because we assume that the direction you have traveled has already spooked off fish that have felt your pressure wave or otherwise heard or felt your presence. However, the fish between 10 and 2 on a long cast have no idea you're there
- Ideally you'll make a 100-120' cast every 15° in an arc from 10-2, working the bait relatively quickly so you can cover water (so 10, 10:30, 11, 11:30, Noon, etc.)
- Pick a fast-paced bait (like a spoon, a topwater, a paddle tail, MirrOdine, twitchbait, jighead and tail) with whichever retrieve method you choose (walk-the-dog, twitch-twitch-pause, straight crank) - just something that will allow you to cover a lot of water relatively quickly
- Once you have covered that arc with the length of your longest casts with no action, you can move the boat up to that longest cast point and begin casting the arc again
- Do not throw into the same direction over and over
- When blind casting and or power fishing, it's always better when water temps are ideal and fish are active. This method can be used in the Winter with a much slower retrieve, which is perfect for suspending twitchbaits, slow rolling spinnerbaits or even heavier weighted paddle tails

Sight Casting

- Sight fishing is not necessarily where you are throwing to a fish target. In fact, most times you're casting to some kind of structure - using your eyes to tell you where the most likely high-percentage spot is
- Attempt to throw your bait past your target, controlling the landing area which helps you avoid casting right on top of fish and spooking them off. Then you can bring the bait back through the target zone at a relaxed pace, but not too slow as to foul on the bottom
- A lighter setup works well as there is usually no need for long casts
- Choose baits that land softer and don't make much of a splash
- This technique will require you to be at a slow, relaxed pace moving down the flat looking for targets to throw to

Smart Casting

- Smart casting is the technique of laying your bait out well past the intended target yet in such a fashion that you are able to bring your bait back through the intended target zone
- Due to casting rods typically being more accurate for casting, a shorter casting rod works well in this scenario - we need accuracy here rather than distance
- Do not focus on the target, focus on a spot well past the target (perhaps 10-15' past, depending on the size of your target zone). Focusing on the target will cause you to cast on top of the target which you want to avoid
- Smart casting works best when the fish are spooky

Natural Retrieve

- Natural retrieves are meant to mimic sea life making the bait look as natural as possible and are more of a static retrieve. Natural retrieves will be used 75-80% of the time
- They will incorporate straight swims, small, short shrimp-like hops, a crab-like drag, a walk-the-dog pattern
- If using a treble hooked lure, reel tight and sweep the rod at a low angle as to not miss the fish or pull it away. If you set up on the fish high, you could pull the lure out of the water and be out of the game. If using a single hook, jig or spoon, reel down and set the hook upward, typically at a 45° angle in deeper water or at a much lower angle in shallower water as to not pull the lure out of the water

Working a Shrimp Bait

- After casting, allow the bait to sink to the bottom then lift, lift, lift, and allow the bait time to fall back to the bottom. Take the slack up and repeat the process again
- When you feel weight on the line, apply a firm hook-set
- The vast majority of strikes will occur when the bait settles on the bottom again

Working a Dragging Bait

- Worm-style baits, crab-like baits and tube baits need to be dragged along the bottom rather than hopped
- This works very well in colder temperatures when the fish are holding close to the bottom or in shallow water with very spooky fish
- After casting, allow the bait time to sink to the bottom then drop the rod tip. Take the slack out of the line and gently pull the rod tip towards you (downwards) to drag the bait across the bottom. Repeat the process. Avoid lifting the rod tip as this will pull the bait off the bottom
- These are good baits to throw around docks, on mudflats or around oyster bars
- Once you feel the weight, reel tight and set the hook
- This technique also works to catch flounder and redfish

Working a Swim Bait

- Paddle tails work great for this technique and are very versatile, allowing you to swim the bait to the surface, down to the midwater and even down to the bottom. They are considered the best lure you can have in your tackle bag
- After making the cast, your retrieve speed will be dependent on where in the water column you want to swim the bait
- If looking to swim it on the bottom, use a slow retrieve where you can feel the bait on the bottom
- In the mid-column, get the bait off the bottom and reel a little faster
- If you want the bait close to the surface, raise the rod tip and reel faster again
- No hopping or twitching is needed

Erratic/Wounded Retrieve

- The erratic/wounded retrieve is best employed in scenarios where there are copious amounts of baitfish present and you need a means to set your bait apart from the masses
- This retrieve method will only be used 20-25% of the time

Hard Bait

- In a hard bait scenario, a MirrOlure 7M (Fig. 5.1) works well in this application, however, using this bait in an area where there are not a lot of baitfish would likely spook fish due to its erratic nature and rattle noise
- The technique here is to do 5-6 twitches and let it float to the surface before twitching again
- This bait works really well on flats less than 3' deep



Soft Bait

- A 5" Jerk Shad Texas-rigged on a weighted hook (again, a 5/0 - 6/0 Mustad Grip Pin is a good choice) can be worked to give the appearance of a wounded baitfish
- Twitching this bait causes it to dart back and forth subsurface and on the pause it will fall to the bottom like a dying bait
- Employ about 3-4 downward twitches before allowing the bait to fall to the bottom and repeating
- Throw slack back towards the lure between each twitch, giving the lure time to glide between each twitch. This promotes the most action
- Whenever using a T-rigged bait, you want to set the hook with authority

Dead Sticking

- Dead Sticking is a technique used rarely but most commonly in very cold temperatures or when targeting or extremely high-pressured fish
- A head-rigged Z-Man TRD bait (Fig. 5.2) loaded up with Pro-Cure works great in this application
- Cast the bait out into the zone where the fish are and just let it sit. The weighted jighead will pin the head to the bottom and because this is a Z-Man bait made out of the buoyant Elaztech material, the tail will sit up off the bottom (Fig. 5.3)
- Every once in a while gently shake your rod tip a little just to help disperse the scent
- You will know you have a fish on when you feel the rod go down and pull away
- Dead Sticking in pot holes, along seawalls and under docks is often effective
- Another technique is to rig the TRD as you would a Jerk Shad with a rigging hook, casting it up-current and free-lining it down with the current allowing it to tumble along the bottom and repeating once your bait is down current - this is called "Riding Current"
- Spoons, soft plastic shrimp, Jerk Shads on a weighted hook, anything that looks natural and will tumble across the bottom

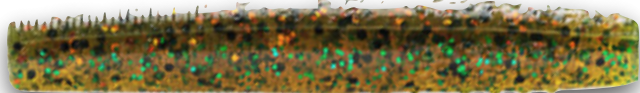


Fig. 5.2



Fig. 5.3

Want To Master Trout Fishing?

Then see the video-based Trout Mastery course. The course gives you all the info found here and more in video tutorials to give you an even better understanding of what you need to do on the water.

Learn more about it here: www.SaltStrong.com/TMC

Skip Casting Tips

- Skip casting is the technique of casting your bait in such a way that it skips up underneath structure - usually docks or mangroves
- Skip casting is a challenging technique to master so once you successfully get your bait up under the structure, don't be in a hurry to pull it out of there
- Once up under the structure, do not engage the casting reel or close the bail on a spinning reel - allow the bait to fall naturally to the bottom then twitch the bait out slowly
- The technique involves keeping your rod below your waist, generating enough rod speed low and parallel to the water and throwing the bait on a low trajectory
- When you cast, follow through straight towards the target - avoid bringing your rod around to the side
- You can rig the bait weedless to lessen the likelihood of getting hung up in the trees, but this technique comes with a learning curve and you *will* get hung up sometimes
- In shallower dock and mangrove scenarios, skip a 1/8 oz bait. On the deeper docks with some current, use a 1/4 oz and a smaller plastic tail (3") to get the bait down fast

What You Really Need To Know

- Blind casting is power fishing. Pick a bait that you can get out there and retrieve quickly. Cover water between 10-2
- Sight fishing is high-percentage fishing, using your eyes to throw strategically to areas that you think have fish or you have seen fish in
- When Smart Casting, keep your eyes on a landing zone beyond your target and work your bait back through the target zone
- 75-80% of the time you will use a natural retrieve - swimming a paddle tail is amongst the most effective baits
- For shrimp or crustacean-looking baits, controlled slow hopping and dragging works well

Want More Trout Mastery Info?

Then order the video-based Trout Mastery course. The course gives you all the info in this book and more in easy-to-use video tutorials to give you an even better understanding of the needed strategies.

Plus, you can get your trout questions answered and see the Q&A activity from other anglers.

Learn more about it here: www.SaltStrong.com/TMC

Bonus Module

How To Position Yourself To Get More Hookups

- This module covers how to approach a flat from a stealth perspective. It will cover:
 - Push poling
 - Safe distances to use your big motor
 - Drifting
 - Wade fishing
 - Kayak techniques
 - Wind and sun position

Sun & Wind Position

- Once you have left the channel and are on the flat, you want to kill your main engine and make a decision about how you want to approach the zone you want to fish (push pole, drift, troll, wade)
- The key is how you position yourself relative to the sun and wind and moving deliberately and slowly
- You're looking for the area that allows you to see bottom features the best and to make your way across the flat identifying fishable areas and looking for good structure
- You want to put yourself in a position where you can keep your boat quiet and also see the best - picking out the potholes, prop scars, baitfish and even the target fish along the way. This way you can do some high-percentage blind casting
- If you have a Power Pole, pick it up just off the surface so you can stop quickly if you spot something promising
- Avoid positioning the sun directly behind you. Although this helps you see better, you become silhouetted to the fish and they see you before you see them (remember, trout can see 15° off the water if they are in less than 2 feet of water)
- It doesn't necessarily need to be your target fish that see you. If the baitfish see you and spook off into the target fish, this will spook off those fish also
- Use the wind to your advantage, allowing it to push you down the flat. You can control the speed of your drift with your push pole by employing it on the leeward side of the boat to slow your drift if need be

Positioning Yourself

- Positioning yourself relies heavily on stealth
- Whispering is a good technique, not so you don't scare the fish with your voice, but to remind yourself to be quiet in all ways
- Avoid too much movement around your boat
- When push poling, do not slam the pole into the bottom, put it in gently then walk it down
- Stick to the centerline of the boat and avoid having to make casts so hard that your weight shifts and you wobble the boat - this will spook the fish
- Avoid opening hatches and other activities that can potentially cause noise and pressure waves while in the fishing zone
- If using a trolling motor, have it on the lowest constant speed that will get you to where you need to be, or even better, that will get you into a position where the wind can take you the rest of the way to where you need to be
- Reduce your noise, reduce your footprint while moving down the flat - if you're spooking fish, you're moving too fast

Drifting for Trout

- Drifting requires at least some wind to be able to push your boat
- On very windy days you can deploy a bucket on a rope to create drag and slow your drift down
- Blind cast and power fish ahead of the boat to spots where the fish aren't yet aware of your presence
- Drifting is a relaxed way to fish, a great way to cover a lot of water and the most stealthy way to move
- Once you locate fish, mark them on your electronics so you can duplicate that path and drift over those fish again
- When drifting on the flat, turn your electronics off or at least go into the menu and turn off the transducer. That little sonar thump in shallow water gives you away to the trout

Gator Trout Tips

Best Time Of The Year

- Best time to target gator trout is when the weather starts cooling off a lot and in March, April and early May during the spawn
- New Moons and Full Moons are great times to catch gator trout
- Target flats and start fishing the day before a cold front with big baits - topwaters, suspending baits like the MirrOdine XL and also lighter colored Jerk Shads
- Gator trout like skinny water in the winter (less than 3 feet) - they don't want to have to hunt their food down in cold water. They want to sit still and ambush
- Survey the area by poling - you will spook some fish and that's ok
- Once you identify fish, silently anchor your vessel, stealthy exit the vessel and start wade-fishing

Best Lures & Colors

- Gator trout are fin-fish eaters - mullet, croakers, pinfish
- When baitfish are non-plentiful, they will eat seahorses, worms, big prawn shrimp
- When working shallow water and not seeing the presence of baitfish in good numbers, match your lure choice to the sea bottom color to imitate crustacean creatures
- Add gold, orange, red, copper and even black to your lure color choices when fishing tannin water areas

- **Best Lures & Colors for Winter Months:**
 - Pink works very well (Paul Brown Pinks or Z-Man Coconut Ice are great)
 - Nuclear Chicken and Electric Chicken are excellent
 - Chrome is a go-to color
 - Root Beer and Root Beer Gold are great colors when the trout are tuned into crustaceans (this will be the colder months when bait fish are not plentiful)
 - Green (or other dark-colored) backs and white bellies mimic fin-fish
 - Bone
 - White with a red head (MirrOlure #11)
 - If fishing lighter colors in the colder months and you're not having success, make a drastic color change to something dark
- **Best Lures & Colors for Summer Months:**
 - Whites and Chrome in the Summer months (52M MirrOlure in #18 color on a deeper flat. Sinks fast, about 1' for per second)

Go-To Gator Trout Lures

- For topwater, the MirrOlure 3/4 oz Top Dog Jr. (Bone and Silver) eliminates a lot of the smaller fish (See Fig. 4.8)
- For suspending plugs, the Paul Brown Original is a slow sinker with a wire frame that allows you to bend the bait to make it track up or down (Fig. B.1)
- The MirrOdine XL (Fig. B.2) is great on overcast days fishing a little deeper. It's larger size eliminates a lot of the smaller fish
- Texas-Rigged Jerk Shad (see Fig. 4.15) on a 5/0 rigging hook (Mustard Grip Pin Hook). This bait works great on cold days, gliding it over shallow, round, yellow potholes. Root Beer and Coconut Ice colors work well
- A heavy 52M MirrOlure 18 (Green back, White belly, Silver scales) works exceptionally well when fishing deeper water and you need to get the bait down to the bottom quickly, as it sinks at about 1' per second (Fig. B.3)
- Z-Man EZ ShrimpZ on a 2/0 rigging hook or Gold-colored 1/16 oz jighead when fishing pressured zones or when the fish are not biting
- 5" Z-Man Jerk Shadz on a 5/0 Mustad Grip Pin hook, 1/16 oz size
- Z-Man Trout Trick in Opening Night color on a 3/8 oz jighead thrown up current - great between bridge pylons
- The Tidal Surge Maniac Mullet (See Fig. 4.10) is another excellent choice for gator trout
- If night fishing dock lights, try clear/metallic flake combo colors as you work lures in the lights or the default glow or white colors.
- If fishing after dark in creeks or on the flats, use a color that silhouettes well against moonlit sky. Examples would be purple, black or Root Beer





Z-Man Scented Jerk ShadZ in Coconut Ice Color



Z-Man Scented Jerk ShadZ in Electric Chicken Color



Z-Man Scented Jerk ShadZ in Root Beer Gold Color



Z-Man Swimmin' Trout Trick in Opening Night Color



Z-Man Rigged EZ Shrimpz in Natural Color

Trout On Demand “TOD”

- Trout on Demand is a term for rigs that are sure-fire trout catchers

Carolina Rig

- Take a 3 oz bullet sinker to glass bead to swivel with a light 24” leader to a light wire 2/0 circle hook rigged with a Z-Man Curly Tail or a live shrimp - great rig for inexperienced anglers! (Figs. B.4 and B.5)
- Throw this rig to the target zone, slowly dragging it along the bottom. Twitch every few seconds to engage the clicking sound made by the bullet weight and glass bead



Tandem Rig

- Take a 1/8 oz jighead tied in tandem with scented curly tails rigged through the head, keel style
 - Take 36” to 40” of 20 lb mono or fluorocarbon and tie a 1/8 oz jighead to each end using a Palomar Knot
 - Bend leader material back about half way so that the two jigs are about 15” to 18” apart (one higher than the other)
 - Tie a Double Overhand Knot where you bent the leader to create a loop. At that point you can either attach a small swivel or tie directly to your mainline (braid)

State Specific Tips

Texas Tips

- In Summer (July, August, early September) the trout will fall off the flats into deeper water (8-12' deep)
- Use bigger, flashier plugs that push water
- Pearl and Pink fast-sink Tidal Surge baits work very well (Fig. B.6). It gets to depth quickly (sinks about 1' per second)
- A big, noisy topwater like a She Dog (Fig. B.7) also works great
- MirrOlure 51 (Fig. B.8) and 52's (See Fig. B.3) are flashy, fast-sinking and get down quickly



Fig. B.6



Fig. B.7



Fig. B.8

Want to see the entire video-based interactive Trout Mastery course? Go here for a special book buyers only offer:

www.SaltStrong.com/TMC

Louisiana Tips

- In the Spring, bounce jigs off the oyster reefs in the bays in about 4-6' depths
- Employ a tandem rig in here, rigged with curly tails on charters or red jigheads (Fig. B.9)
- Best lure colors include White, Glow, LSU (purple with a chartreuse tail), Morning Glory (black with a chartreuse tail)

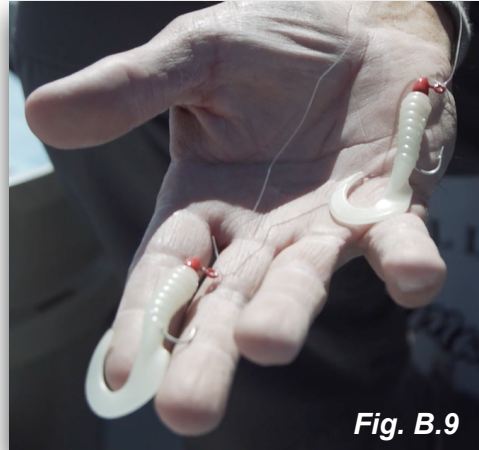


Fig. B.9

Georgia & Carolina Tips

- Carolina rig a buoyant and scented Z-Man curly tail (New Penny is a great option), keel-weighted on a circle-hook (See Figs. B.4, B.5 and B.10)
- Target bends in the river, creeks with deep holes, bridges and docks - anywhere where trout are going to hold up in cold weather while seeking temperature refuge
- The clicking weight stays down on the bottom while the buoyant lure dances behind it off the bottom
- When the trout hits you'll just feel weight and the circle-hook will do all the work, setting itself



Fig. B.10

Alabama & Mississippi

- When conditions begin to warm after winter and the bait starts moving into the bridges in the deeper channels (15-20'), try the following rig:
 - Take a 3/8 oz jighead (something light enough to move in current)
 - Rig this on a Z-Man Swimmin' Trout Trick in Opening Night color
 - Throw up-current, let it fall and swim down and ride the current with the tail motion attracting fish

The C.A. Method: Pre-Trip Planning

- This module is all about what to do *before* you go fishing
- Prepare and rig tackle the night before the trip so you do not waste valuable fishing time

Weather & Water Temps

- A great weather app to use on a smart-phone is called “FishWeather”. You can download it for IOS or Android devices
- Use the information the app provides to target a spot that will benefit you most based on the wind direction and position of the sun
- “Windfinder Pro” (Fig. B.13) and “Pro Angler” (Fig. B.14) are also great apps

Tides - GPS Real Tide App

- The GPS Real Tide app (Fig. B.12) has a plethora of great tide information that allows you to choose the exact area you want to fish simply by tapping on that area on the map. It also has some pre-determined tide points you can choose
- “Aye Tides” (Fig. B.15) is another excellent app for tides times and even current velocity
- Remember, in colder temps, the falling tide is the best time to target trout as the water has sat on the shallower flats, radiating in the sun’s heat. This warmer water will trigger the trout’s metabolism



Fig. B.12

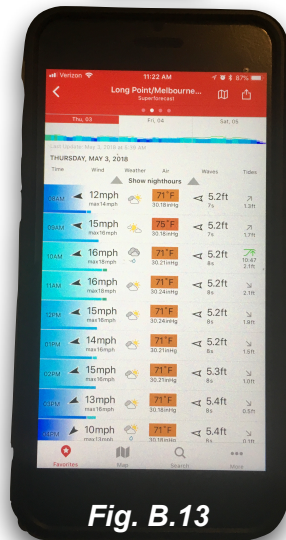


Fig. B.13



Fig. B.14

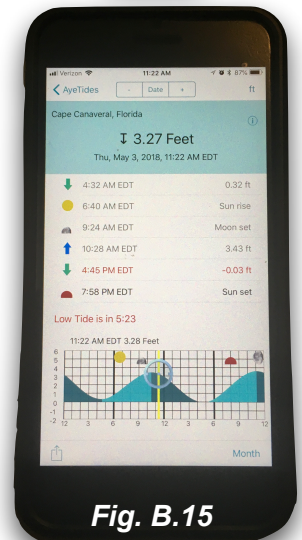


Fig. B.15

Nautical Charts & Satellite Maps

- Using your laptop computer at the house the night before a trip is extremely productive as it allows you to get familiar with the area you’re going to fish
- Online maps like Google, Google Earth and Bing will show you excellent detail of your target areas including bottom depths, contours and structure
- Once on the water, you will rely more on your onboard electronics
- Not preparing is preparing to fail - having a plan in place with contingency plans is critical to success on the water

Pre-Rigging Gear

- Pre-rigging is the practice of choosing and rigging your gear *before* you get on the water
- Base your pre-rigging off of the species you intend to target
- Try to have a couple of “Fish of Opportunity” rods - these would be rods rigged for other species that may show up that you’re not prepared for. For example, you’re fishing for trout, but a large tarpon shows up
- A 5” Jerk Shad, MirrOdine XL, Z-Man 5” Grass KickerZ or a 51MR MirrOlure are solid choices for the “Fish of Opportunity”
- When rigging, think about your confidence baits and choose rods that will throw those baits effortlessly
- A good arsenal might look like this:
 - A topwater rod
 - A suspending plug rod
 - A spoon rod
 - A T-Rigged Jerk Shad rod
 - A jig/paddle tail rod
 - A sight fishing rod rigged with either a bucktail or plastic shrimp

What You Really Need To Know

- Keep the sun at your back to avoid being an easily seen silhouette to the fish
- Use the wind to your advantage, allowing it to push you down the flat
- Positioning yourself is all about stealth
- If using a trolling motor, have it on the lowest constant speed
- When drifting, blind cast and power fish ahead of the boat to spots where the fish aren’t yet aware of your presence

Thank you so much for investing in this Trout Mastery Blueprint book. I trust you received a ton of value and we can't wait to hear about the transformation in your trout fishing results. If you'd like to see ALL of the exclusive footage from the course at a special low rate (for book buyers like you only), then go to the link here:

www.SaltStrong.com/TMC

Bonus Pictures



**Z-Man Scented Jerk ShadZ
Root Beer Gold Package**



**Z-Man Scented Jerk ShadZ
Coconut Ice Package**



**Z-Man EZ ShrimpZ
Natural Color Package**



**Mirrolure 51MR (18)
Package**



**Tidal Surge Maniac Mullet
Package**