

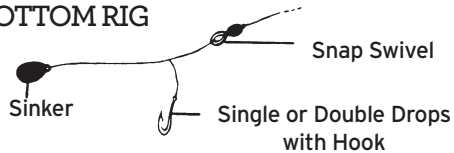
HOW TO CATCH

Black drum fishing can be enjoyed by anyone at almost any time. It is a relaxing outing compared to some of the other types of fishing, which often requires experience, expensive tackle, boats and related equipment. Anyone can catch drum, regardless of skill or finances. Tackle can be rod and reel, trotline, sail line, hand line or cane pole, and bait is inexpensive. Fishing can be done from piers or from the bank where the entire family can join in.

Black drum are rarely taken on artificial baits (unless they are scented) since most feeding is done by feel and smell. Popular baits include cut fish, squid and shrimp, with peeled shrimp tails (preferably ripe and smelly) the most popular. Since feeding is done on the bottom, the basic technique is simple - put a baited hook on the bottom and wait for a drum to swallow it.

The tackle to be used depends on the size of the fish present. For small drum, light tackle offers great sport, but for 40-pounders, heavy rods with plenty of backbone are needed. Use a strong single hook with line and leader of appropriate strength. For more sport, try light tackle using a single drop with no sinker, allowing the bait to move along the bottom with the current. If the bait will not sink, a few split shot on the leader will help. The absence of weight increases the fight of the fish. A conventional bottom rig with a sinker and one or more drops with single hooks is commonly used for shoreline fishing and fishing from an anchored boat.

BOTTOM RIG



Drum will often "mouth" the bait for some time before swallowing it, so wait until the fish moves off with the bait; then jerk the rod tip up to set the hook. Black drum aren't known for the heart-stopping, line-stripping runs and top-water strikes of their spotted seatrout and red drum cousins, but they are powerful fish that often put up a strong, determined fight.

TAKING CARE OF CATCH

Do not let your fish die on the stringer. Ice it down as soon as possible. Gutting and gilling helps maintain freshness, but do not remove the head or tail until you are finished fishing and are off the water, because this is a game violation.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR COOKING

Many maintain that black drum under 5 pounds, cleaned and prepared properly, are as good as or better than many of these so-called "choice" fish. Avid drum anglers usually fillet their fish but don't throw away the throat, considering this to be the best part of the fish. Drum can be prepared in many ways but are probably best just rolled in cornmeal and fried. The flesh is solid white and neither dry nor oily. Fish taken in cold weather before spawning tend to be fatter and in better condition than those taken in summer after spawning. Drum weighing more than 5 pounds usually have coarse flesh—the larger the fish, the coarser the flesh. Many coastal restaurants noted for their seafood serve drum extensively, and the fish should be available at local seafood markets.

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

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



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

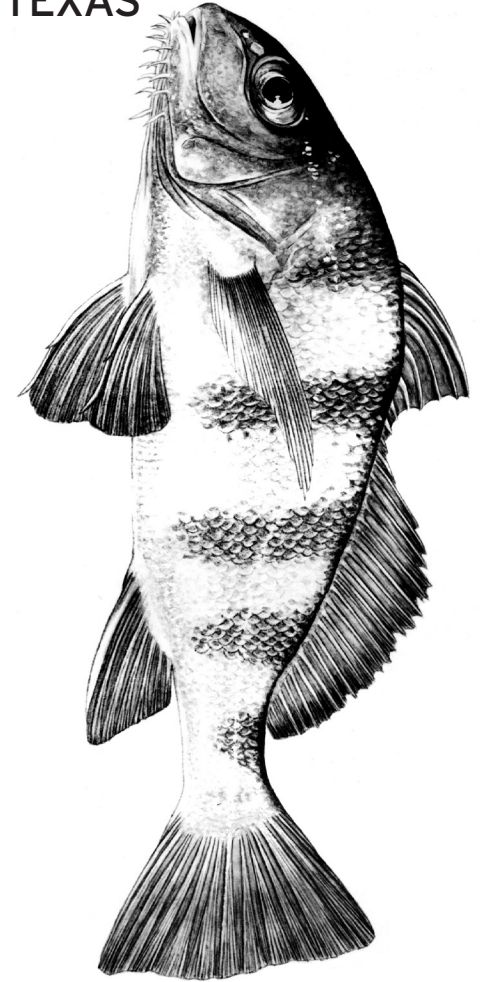
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COASTAL FISHERIES

Black Drum

IN TEXAS

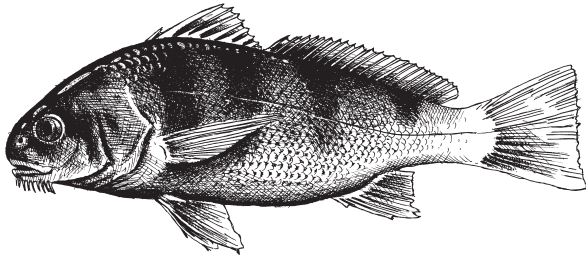


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The black drum (*Pogonias cromis*), a mainstay in the commercial fishery, has never been fully accepted by sport anglers. Annual harvest of black drum along the Texas coast has averaged 2 million pounds by the commercial fishery and three-quarters of a million pounds by the sport fishery for the last 10 years.

Known locally by such names as Texas drum, sea drum, saltwater drum, gray drum, drumfish, striped drum and tambor, this fish is a member of the drum family and is related to the Atlantic croaker, red drum and spotted seatrout. A characteristic of this family of fish is the ability to produce croaking or drumming sounds with their air bladders—hence, the names “croaker” or “drum.” This ability is most developed in the black drum, and anglers can sometimes hear the drum of schools passing near their boats.

Small fish, under 1 pound in weight, are sometimes called “butterfly drum,” while those of larger size (30 pounds and more) are called “bull drum,” although the large specimens can be either male or female.



IDENTIFICATION

The black drum is a chunky, high-backed fish with many barbells or whiskers under the lower jaw. Younger fish—less than 12 inches in length—typically have four or five dark vertical bars on their sides which disappear with age. As they grow older, their color can vary greatly from black to gray with sometimes even a bronze tint. Fish from Gulf waters are generally light gray or silvery, while those taken from bay waters are often darker in color.

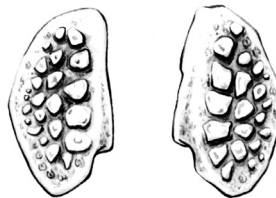
SPAWNING

Unlike spotted seatrout, which spawn only in the bays, and red drum, which spawn only in the nearshore Gulf, black drum can spawn in the bays or the Gulf or in the connecting passes. Studies have shown that in the upper Laguna Madre, black drum often spawn in the hypersaline lagoon and at a smaller size which differs from the rest of the coast. Free spawning (random release of eggs) occurs mostly in February, March and April, with some later spawning occurring in June and July. Larval drum are found in March and April, and by early summer, juveniles one-half to 1 inch long are common along bay shorelines.

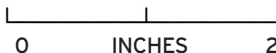
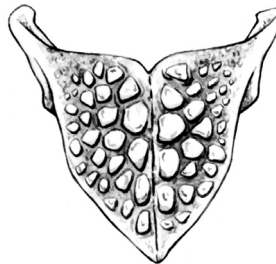
FEEDING

Young drum feed on small marine worms, shrimp, crabs and fish. While the diet of larger drum does not differ greatly, it does shift to bigger crustaceans and mollusks. Barbels (or whiskers) are used to locate food by feel and smell. Drum often dig or root out buried mollusks and worms while feeding in a head-down position. This process is called “tailing” and forms small craters in the bottom which anglers call “drum noodles.” Experienced anglers can detect the recent passage of a school of drum by the presence of large numbers of “noodles.”

UPPER TEETH



LOWER TEETH



Black drum don't have canine teeth like those of the spotted seatrout, but do have highly developed pharyngeal teeth (in the pharynx or throat), which are used to crush mollusks and crabs before swallowing.

GROWTH

A length of 8 - 9 inches is reached in the first year, 11 - 13 inches the second year, and 14 - 17 inches the third year. Increases of about 2 inches per year occur after that. Black drum in the upper Laguna Madre grow at a slower rate than do fish from the rest of the coast. The largest black drum registered by the International Game Fish Association weighed 113 pounds. The Texas record taken by a recreational angler is 81 pounds, but most bull drum caught weigh 30 to 40 pounds.

MOVEMENTS

When food is plentiful and water conditions acceptable, movements are small, but long migrations in search of food and more desirable habitat have been recorded. Spawning migration and movements toward freshwater flow also are notable. Tagging studies have recorded migrations of 254 miles in one year or less, but most distances covered were less than 10 miles.

WHERE TO FISH

In the summer months, schools of 1- to 4-pound drum can be found in shallow water. If the water is clear, the schools can sometimes be spotted, but the clear water makes the fish spooky and hard to approach. Schools of drum feeding in shallow water often produce a telltale patch of muddy water, which allows a fisherman to drift a boat or wade into the school. Try cut bait or peeled shrimp here.

During the colder months, drum of all sizes frequent deeper waters and channels as well as the Gulf surf. They are then taken on bottom rigs along channel slopes, in the open bay and in the surf. Check the fishing reports on the radio and in newspapers for assistance, as well as local fish camps, bait stands and tackle shops to find the current hot spots.