

Circle Hooks

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What they are — how they work

A circle hook is a fishing hook designed and manufactured so that the point is turned perpendicularly back to the shank to form a generally circular or oval shape.

The principle behind the hook is simple. After the fish has taken the bait, the angler removes any slack in the line by reeling the hook in steadily. The unique hook shape causes the hook to slide toward the point of resistance and embed itself in the jaw or in the corner of the fish's mouth. The actual curved shape of the hook keeps the hook from catching in the gut cavity or throat.



J Hook

Circle Hook

When to use them

Circle hooks can be used on any species of fish caught on hook and line. Circle hooks have been used by commercial fishermen for decades due to their ability to efficiently catch fish. Today, both fresh water and saltwater fishermen are using circle hooks to increase survival rates of the fish that they catch and release.

How to use them

Circle hooks are easy to use. Simply bait the hook as usual. You will have better luck if you don't put the hook through a bony portion of the bait. This will allow the hook action to work for you and to hook the fish as the line is retrieved.

An offset circle hook indicates the end of the hook has been angled sideways, away from the shank. Some research shows the greater the degree of offset, the greater the likelihood of injuring a hooked fish. In Florida state waters, the use of offset circle hooks is not allowed when fishing for Gulf reef fish. Offset circle hooks are permitted when fishing for reef fish in federal waters, but their use is discouraged.



Non-offset
circle hook

Offset
circle hook

Bottom fishing

For bottom fishing simply replace your standard hook with a circle hook. When a fish takes the bait, allow time for the hook to position itself in the jaw or corner of the fish's mouth before steadily reeling in the line. Do not attempt to set the hook by sharply jerking the rod as this will pull the hook out of the fish's mouth.



Bait circle hooks in the same way as J Hooks, but steadily reel in the line — do not set the hook with a sharp jerk.

Trolling

Offshore fishermen are successfully trolling with their usual trolling rigs by simply replacing the old style J hooks with circle hooks. Rig the bait as for any other bait-trolling rig, using fishing wire, a rubber band, or waxed floss to fasten the hook to the bait. This allows the hook to hang freely.

Live bait

For live bait simply hook the bait through a fleshy part of the fish. This allows the bait to swim freely and allows the hook to set when a fish strikes.

Hooking techniques

There is only one technique: do not set the hook. Steadily and slowly reel in the slack in the line until the hook sets itself in the fish. This requires you to fish with patience and restraint — patience to make sure the fish has had time to swallow the bait, and restraint in the initial urge to set the hook.

Benefits

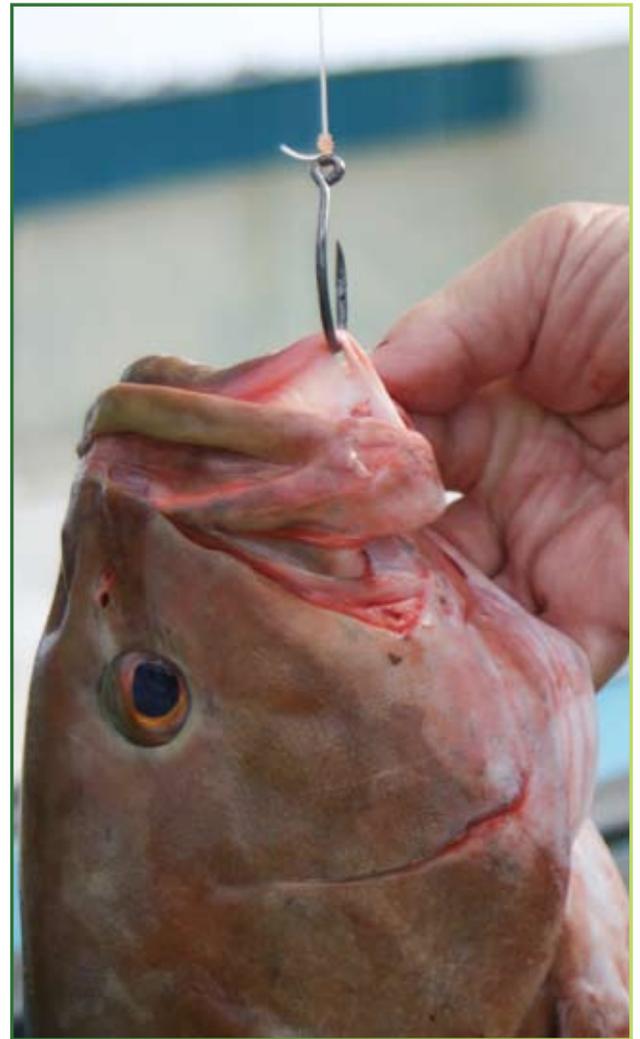
The hook sets itself when you reel in the line. This is great for inexperienced anglers and for deep-water fishing.

With circle hooks, there are fewer gut-hooked fish.

Scientific studies predict higher survival rates for released fish when using circle hooks and careful catch-and-release techniques.

Fish hooked in the corner of the mouth or jaw tend to fight better than fish that are hooked in the gut — and circle hooks mainly hook up in the corner of the mouth or jaw.

With the hook in the corner of the mouth the line is generally out of the way of the fish's teeth, so lighter leaders can be used for sportfishing.



A typical hook-up with a “keeper” red grouper shows a circle hook in the side of the fish's mouth.



For information on marine fish conservation, visit Florida Sea Grant at: www.flseagrants.org



For information on catch-and-release fishing visit Solutions For Your Life, an extension education web resource at: www.catchandrelease.org