

Springtime Spanish Macks Lure, Bait or Fly – A Guarantee

by Joshua W. Broer

Finding Spanish mackerel on the west central gulf coast of Florida in the springtime is pretty much a guarantee. Slow-trolling spoons along the beaches is usually a fast way to find the fish and diving birds also often give them away. If that doesn't work, nothing beats the old-fashioned chum block off the side of the boat which can be purchased for about \$6-8 in most local bait and tackle shops. A 15 minute chum block soak is normally all that it takes to get the fish swarming around the boat. Once they show up, it's game on for as long as you want to play.

There are so many ways to catch Spanish macks in both the spring and fall it is almost exhausting to think about. Some anglers love the old run-and-gun method that involves following diving birds which are taking part in the frenzy of macks destroying bait pods as far as the eye can see. The fish are usually in such attack mode that even your outboard motor won't spook them as long as you don't drive directly through the school. Race to the scene, cut the motor, cast your favorite lure into the mix and you should be hooked up within seconds. When the bait moves, the birds move, and so do you.

Many folks catch their share of macks directly off the beach wading, or fishing from long piers. You don't have to be too far from shore to get into a mess of these fish. You'll even find them on the deeper grass flats while targeting reds and trout. Make no mistake about, when you're jigging the flats with only 12 lb. test leader and your line comes back cut clean, it was no trout! The fish get thick, really thick, and venture everywhere.

Though you can catch as many macks on artificial lures as you can live bait, my favorite technique will always be fishing them with whitebait just off the beach. Anchor up in about 10-15 feet of water, hang your chum block over the gunwale, get a live out and hang on. If you know the migration patterns of these fish around your favoring areas you can pretty much



Friend of the author, Brian Nowokunski, holds up one of the bigger macks of the day. This fish was caught on cut bait.

guarantee a fast and furious bite within minutes of getting that chum into the water. To add some excitement, throw a few live baits out into your chum slick and watch how fast they come. This makes for perfect light weight spin tackle action for friends who just want to catch some fish or kids who have never experienced constant bent rod, drag screaming action.

There are a few good tips for actually catching Spanish macks versus having them break you off every cast. First, and most important, if using mono leader, it should be at least 30 lb. test. Often that is not even thick enough. 50 lb. test leader will keep you in business for a good 5-10 fish in a row... usually. Some folks like to use wire leader to avoid break-offs altogether but as most seasoned mack fishermen know, you'll get fewer bites this way. A second good tip is to use long shank hooks if you are using live bait. This acts as a bite guard and will also help to reduce break-offs. Last, let the fish take some drag. They are notorious speedsters and the bigger fish can rip off a hundred feet of line or more in a few seconds. Use your reel's drag to your advantage and let them tire themselves out. Besides, who doesn't love the sound of that high-pitched drag!?

Fly fishing for macks is another great way to spend the day catching these relatively easy to hook fish. When the chum slick is doing its thing and the fish are slicing and dicing all around the boat, a quickly stripped fly won't last long in the water. Keep the fly moving all the way back to

Friend of the author and local fly fishing guru, Bradley Lowman, displays his fish's fly-caught chompers. That fly is done



Longtime friend and fishing buddy, Michael Kneapler, demonstrating mack fighting fun on ultralight spin tackle.

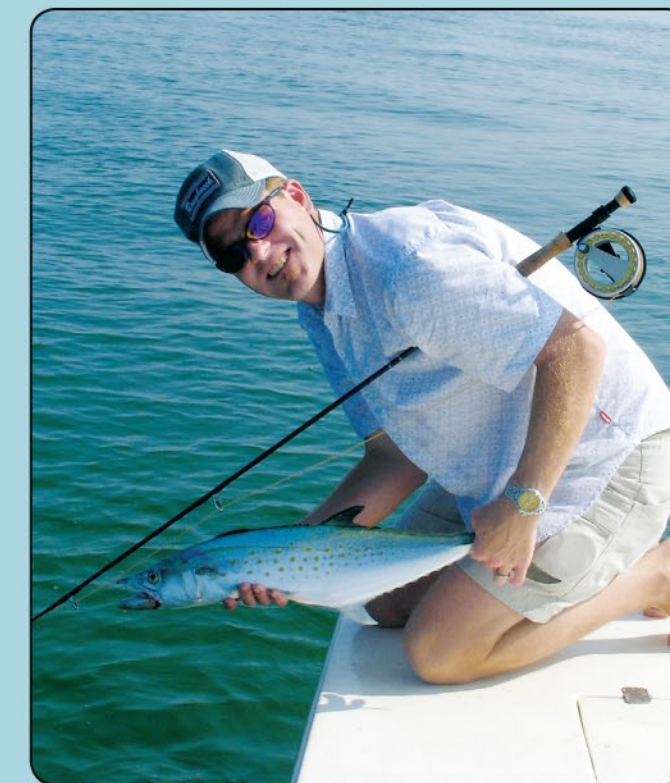


This underwater photo shows that with your chum block deployed, the list of visitors can be long, including these Remoras.



A huge pile of mack fillets ready to be marinated, then slow-smoked for the whole neighborhood to share, Super Bowl Sunday.

the boat as fast as possible and hold on for that explosive strike. Scale down your fly rig from your regular 8 weight to a 6 weight and see how much more fun you will have. No need to switch lines either as your go-to floating, weight-forward fly line is perfect for this application. Again, these guys have teeth. They're sharp and they have a lot of them. So, bump up your bite tippet or tie a lot of flies.



Bradley Lowman showing a fat Spanish mackerel caught on fly before release.

The water temperature is at that perfect mid-70s range now so the Spanish mack attack is in full swing. If you can't find the snook, the reds won't chew and you're all trouted-out, hit the beach for all-day tight lines. Heck, you don't even need moving water. And although they're not everyone's favorite table fare, a mess of hickory smoked macks is perfect for any weekend backyard BBQ or big ol' neighborhood fish fry. You simply can't go wrong with this guaranteed bite.

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