

# Chef's Corner: Go from Eight & Bait to Plate the Bait!

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*For those anglers tired of discarding expensive unused bait after a day in the surf or on the water, these ideas transform fresh bait into fine table fare!*

Eight ounces of weight and fresh bait cast into a slough along the OBX shoreline is a mantra for anglers pursuing large Red Drum. This article puts a tasty twist on the old “8 & Bait” mantra!

The recurring theme throughout my Chef's Corner series is the ethical and responsible utilization of every inch and every ounce of the fish and game harvested during our outdoors adventures.

This article extends that theme to an oft-overlooked part of our overall angling experience – fresh bait.

That's right – BAIT!

Far too often I see anglers afford little care to the preservation and maintenance of fresh baits such as shrimp, squid, clams, crab, fish, and more.

I can't change the world in a day, but why not treat our bait like we were going to eat it at the end of the day?

Many years ago, I participated in a three-day surf fishing school with OBX master surf fisherman Joe Malat. Joe has authored several books on surf fishing and is very well respected throughout the Coastal Carolinas.

One of the greatest take-aways I retained from that experience pertained to the use of the freshest bait possible as essential to success in the surf.

Joe simply said:

***“Never use a bait that you would not be willing to eat yourself.”***

I never forgot that, and on many occasions, I have witnessed those with the freshest bait having more success in catching while others fished. Of course, live bait is as fresh as it gets, but icing and cold storage immediately after securing fresh bait prolongs freshness and slows the natural degradation which otherwise follows.

“Fresh Frozen” will do in a pinch, but “Fresh-Fresh” is always the way to go, and some baits freeze better than others!

So here we go – I hope you enjoy reading this as much as I did writing it!!

## Common “Baits” that Make Great Table Fare:

Knowing what to do with fresh bait after the fishing day is done is a great insurance policy for those great days of fishing that don't result in much catching!

While not all bait is practically edible, most natural baits are equally as palatable to us and the fish we target!



***Broiled Shrimp-stuffed Cob Mullet fillets.***



***Crispy-Fried Whole Finger Mullet.***

Here are a few of the most notable baits that are convert to fine table fare:

- Fresh Mullet
- Fresh Shrimp
- Fresh Squid
- Fresh Clams
- Fresh Live Sand Fleas (yes, they are excellent!)
- Fresh Blue Crabs
- Other Fresh food fish such as Spot, Croaker, or Bluefish
- Sorry, Fresh Live Bloodworms didn't make the list!



***Fresh Mullet is the most popular bait across OBX.***

While this article does not provide any detailed recipes, it does offer a visual history of many of the dishes that I have created from leftover bait that was properly cared for from the field to the kitchen.

I also list several new recipes that I am in the process of documenting, and to be honest, once you embrace the concept of edible bait, the sky is the limit!

In any case, many of these dishes would easily pass the taste test in the poshest restaurants and kitchens, so open up your mind and enjoy these great suggestions on how to utilize every ounce and every inch of your fresh bait!



***Bait Shrimp Imperial Stuffing.***



***Bait Shrimp-stuffed Bellas.***



***Broiled Shrimp-stuffed Bellas.***



***"Bait Stew" – Shrimp, Squid, & Clam.***



***Broiled Shrimp-stuffed Shrimp!***



***Shrimp-stuffed Bellas & Spinach.***



***Blackened Horse Mullet Bites.***



***Crispy Bait Po' Boy Mix!***



***Crispy Bait Po' Boy Sammich!***





***Bait Mullet, Clam, & Crab Chowder.***



***Cut Bait-n-Shrimp with Andouille.***



***Cut Bait-n-Shrimp Gumbo.***



***Bait Shrimp Taco Fixins'.***



***Marinated Shrimp-n-Squid.***



***Bait Shrimp Scampi with Lime.***



***Chopping the Shrimp.***



***Prepping Shrimp Salad.***



***Bait Shrimp Salad Cold Plate.***



***Toasted Shrimp Salad Sandwich.***



***Chunky Shrimp Salad Sandwiches.***



***Minced Shrimp Salad Sandwich.***



## Put Your Bait on A Plate!

Until now, unused bait was either discarded or haphazardly preserved for later use in a far less palatable state. That does not have to happen ever again! As much money as we spend on our bait, why not recover every penny of our investment?



***Smoked Mullet Dip & National Beer of Hatteras Island!***



***Fried Bait Shrimp & Cob Mullet Plate.***

As the pictures above and list below demonstrates, it makes far more sense to eat today's fresh bait and start anew tomorrow with a – pardon the pun – “Fresh Start!”!

Just look at the diversity of these dishes which I recently created using leftover bait as the main ingredient:

- Mullet Poppers –these fried delicacies are excellent served with sweet chili sauce or homemade tartar sauce!
- Shrimp Po’ Boys –fry them up in a crispy batter to serve on hoagie or hot dog rolls with shredded lettuce, cheddar, pickle, tartar sauce, and a side of fries...you can also chop cut bait or clams and fry crispy for this!
- Shrimp Salad – shrimp is shrimp...calling it “bait” doesn’t change that!
- Seafood Noodle salad (shrimp, squid, mullet)
- Shrimp Burgers – a Hatteras Harbor tradition!
- Smoked Mullet – this is a real delicacy and has few rivals! A MUST try!
- Fried Mullet and Chips – much like the Old English Pub recipe!
- Blackened Mullet – let the Cajun loose!
- Mullet Fish Cakes – rich and fluffy!
- Fried Squid (Calamari) – my bait squid is MUCH fresher than the frozen variety served in most restaurants!
- Oriental Seafood Stew (shrimp, squid, clam, and cut mullet chunks)
- Clams on the Half-shell with lemon, cocktail sauce, and Tabasco – simple and delicious!
- Baked Clams Oreganata – another vintage recipe from my years in the family restaurant!
- Manhattan-style Clam Chowder (for you Yankees & Mets fans!)
- New England-style Clam or Seafood Chowder (for you Red Sox fans!)
- Sand Flea Poppers – Yes, these are an appetizer version of fried soft-shell crabs, and they are excellent!
- Sand Flea Po’ Boys – especially for the smallest fleas – just fry super crispy and voila – better than Soft Shells!
- Shrimp-stuffed Broiled Mullet – VBAC Angler tested and approved!
- Shrimp-stuffed Portabellas – Lotsa flavors popping out of this superb dish!
- Curried Seafood with Vegetables (can use shrimp, mullet, squid, and clams)
- Kickin’ Cajun Smoked Cut Bait and Cheese Dip – a “bait-n-switch” on the Cajun Jack-n-Cheese recipe!
- Crispy-Fried Finger Mullet – A take off on fried Smelts!

And that’s just the tip of the iceberg once you get your imagination into focus!

So, the next time you have leftover chowder clams after a Spadefish trip, make a chowder!

Leftover shrimp from chasing Spring Puffers? Whip up a tasty shrimp salad!

Too many finger mullets from that Bluefish tournament? Crisp-fry em' whole!

Leftover Cob Mullet from the Drum trip? Try smoking a batch!

Leftover squid? Fry-up a batch of Calamari!

And so on...

Happy fishing, and I hope this piece has sparked some inspiration to extend our ethical utilization of every inch and every ounce to the fresh bait that was killed to support our fishing adventures!

Here are a few more goodies to get you salivating as you process the concept of eating your bait!



***Baked Clams Oreganata.***



***Smoked Mullet - Butterflied.***



***Smoked Mullet Fillets.***

So, now that you are armed with this new source of knowledge, you will never have to go hungry again on those “rare” fishing trips where the catching is slow, and a pile of expensive fresh bait is all that stands between you and an excellent meal!

***Bon Appetite!***

**Look for these recipes in current and future editions of CHAC's Chef's Corner!**

***Contributed by: VBAC Angler John Germanos, aka “The Instinctive Chef”***