

# Sharks, jacks, bluefish and the ladies: it's Summer!

By Capt. Chuck Eichner

Water LIFE Inshore

The ladyfish is quite likely the most under rated fish in southwest Florida. Largely ignored as a gamefish there are no size or bag limits, but the ladyfish has saved many a day for me with pure drag pulling, reckless jumping and at the same time being easy to catch around the entire harbor. In late summer and fall you will see massive schools of ladyfish boiling on small baitfish. Most anglers will ride right past the schools as I have done for years.

In more recent times, I have come to recognize ladyfish as the easiest path to hard pulling sharks, bluefish, jack crevalle and a host of occasional visitors such as cobia and tarpon. For the hot summer months on many trips I prefer to sit under the shade with friends with lines out waiting for a rip using ladyfish for bait. All of the previously mentioned fish love to dine on or dine with the ladyfish. Rarely, do they give sign that they are sharing the same waters until you intentionally fish for them.

Step one to this program is to find a school of ladyfish. The easiest way is to cast jigheads with a plastic swim tail-white and chartreuse are hard to beat. Any of the bars that run parallel to the shores



The end twist of the leader at the hook is left long to stop the sliding weight.

will have ladyfish. Drift and cast until a school is located. The east or west bar, Bookelia bar, Cape Haze and the bars in front of Bull and Turtle Bay will have ladyfish.

Once the school is located pitch the ladies as you catch them into a ice cold cooler packed with ice and a bit of seawater. Anchor your boat in the vicinity of where you caught the fish, preferably in the 5-6 foot range.

For rigging, I put together about 6

rigs before heading out because most of these fish including sharks travel in small schools and they all have teeth that can destroy the rig.

To make the rig attach a treble hook (size 2 or 4) or circle hook (size 3/0-4/0) to 18-inches of 30-50# wire. Use a tight haywire twist and leave a 1/4" tag end when clipping. Slide an egg sinker onto the wire and the tag end will act as a stop to keep the sinker off the hook. On the line end attach a small swivel. Cut a 1-2-inch slice of ladyfish and place on the hook and cast out. With 2 or 3 rods in the rod holders you are now ready to chum. Using a super sharp knife dice and slice up the ladyfish and sprinkle into the water occasionally. If the fish are traveling the area you will be hooked up within a half hour. Stronger tides produce better bites as the ladyfish oil and chum trail carries further.

The exciting thing about this type of fish is you never know what will bite next! A shark one cast, a bluefish the next and sometimes you will hook fish that you cannot stop. This is easiest



These are my nieces, Kaitlin and Lindsey. Kaitlin is in the orange and black.



fishing on Charlotte Harbor and most days will result in a burning drag and a fish dinner!

Capt. Chuck Eichner operates Action Flats Backcountry Charters and can be contacted for charters at 941-505-0003 or visit [www.backcountry-charters.com](http://www.backcountry-charters.com)

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