

dozen of them can be kept in a 5 gallon container if the water is changed regularly.

There are a number of ways to rig this fish, which run from one to 6 inches in size. For freelining in a strong current, the hook should be placed under the chin and out the bridge of the nose.

If fished under a float, hook the fish in front of the dorsal. When fishing on the bottom with a sliding sinker rig or deep water freelining, the fish can be hooked just in front of the anal fin. Near the mangroves or on the grass flats pinfish are best fished under a float because they have a tendency to run and hide.

When freelining a pinfish, a very slow retrieve should be used so the fish can't hide. When bottom fishing, the bait must be moved periodically to insure it doesn't get under some obstruction. Depending on the size of the bait, hook size can range from 1 to 7/0. This bait is preferred by cobia, grouper and tarpon as well as other predator fish.



### Finger Mullet

These fish are best for bait when they are 2 to 10 inches long. Because of their jumping characteristics they require a lid on the baitwell or bucket because they will jump out. Use a sliding sinker rig or freeline them since they will not stay under a float.

Occasionally bait shops have them but they are normally caught with a cast net. Mullet do not respond to chumming and are usually caught in shallow water.

The two most common hooking methods for this bait are through both lips or in front of the dorsal. When casting or freelining, hooking through both lips works best. If hooked through the back, the fish will stay near the surface when freelined. A regular shank bait hook such as an Eagle Claw 85 or a Mustad 3407 work well. These fish need frequent changes of water so a circulating live is needed.

The finger mullet is a superior bait for tarpon, snook, and shark. It also works well with other species. Many artificial lures are patterned after the mullet shape, which is a sure indication they are an excellent bait.



Additional bait fish caught in Charlotte Harbor and the rivers and creeks emptying into it are: pig fish, chubs, mojarra minnows, mutton minnows, bay anchovies, glass minnows, leather jackets, menhaden, shad, needle fish, balao (ballyhoo), sand brim, and Nile perch.

Catching any of these baits is only the first step. They must be kept alive, and that usually requires some type of aeration or continuous water exchange system.

For those fishermen who want to keep their bait alive for more than a day, use a circular nylon mesh basket, at least 24 by 36 inches, with a foam cover that floats and suspends the net in the water. Bait are put into the net by a hatch in the cover. The live net can be tied to a dock or seawall and will keep bait alive for a least an extra day and frequently for two or three days, depending on various conditions.

**A word of caution:** The *leather jacket* (shown to the right) can give you a nasty 'sting' if you reach into the livewell without paying attention to what you grab. Leather jackets are not normally used as live bait, but are sometimes netted up when looking for other bait-fish.

**CAUTION!**

