

A Cut Bait Tutorial

This is a Cat Tip of the Day I did back in March 2009 and I had copied it into the Fishing Article Forum but over the years the photos dropped off the article so it needed updating.

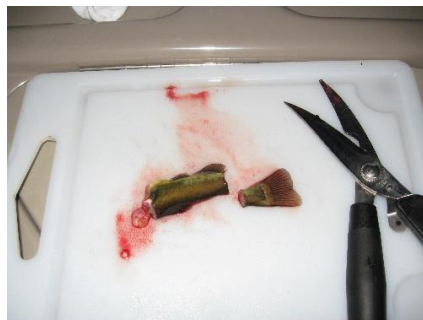
A lot of fishermen have been using live bait for years but have just never thought about using cut bait. To us catfishermen cut bait is one of the preferred methods of presenting bait for channel cats and flatheads. For someone new to catfishing this article should give you a sight picture of how to cut up bait and maybe save a few bucks in bait costs at the same time.

Most people use the medium / large bait store bought suckers for their cut bait because they are easy to get and easy to handle and a very effective cut bait. I am out most every night in the summer chasing cats and I flinch every time I spend \$12 to \$20 for a dozen sucker minnows. I've learned how to catch and keep my own live bait to save myself money and to always have bait on hand. I keep a 100 gallon stock tank at home and try to keep it stocked with about 50 bullheads. Bullheads are tough as nails and easy to keep alive in a home bait tank. I catch bullheads with hook and line and with fish traps that I set in some local ponds. Just about every trip I have plenty of bullheads on hand as a primary source of bait. In addition to the bullheads, I've taken to spending some time at the start of each trip to fish for fresh caught bait. I primarily target suckers and sheepshead. In 30 to 45 minutes fishing time I usually have plenty of suckers or sheepshead to use as bait in addition to the bullheads I brought along.

Making Cut Bullhead:

Some cat fishermen don't like bullheads for cut bait but I have had good luck with it. Live bullheads are my preferred bait for flatheads and I trap and catch my own bullheads. My traps catch a lot of small bullheads (4" to 5") which are perfect to use as cut bait. I have found that one of the best tools for making cut bait is a good scissors or game shears. When cutting up small bullheads scissors makes short work of the task.

On my small bullheads I only make 2 cuts with a scissors. The first cut is just behind the head and the second cut is just in front of the tail. You will end up with a nice chunk of fish with an opening into the gut. This chunk of bullhead will leave a good scent trail in the water. It takes all of 30 seconds to make a perfect piece of cut bait. The scissors in the cut bait photo are my Cabela's game shears. They will cut up anything.



Cut Sucker or Sheepshead

The pictures in the tutorial show me cutting up a 15 inch river caught sucker. I use the same technique described here to cut up sheepshead as well. A sucker or sheepshead that size makes perfect cut bait. The cut bait from the fish that I used when making these photos ended up putting five beautiful channel cats in the boat right after I took the pictures. I like the 15" to 18" suckers or sheepshead that can be easily caught on the St Croix. We were just using a simple plain hook and split shot rig with a piece of nightcrawler for bait.



Step one: Run the fillet knife down one side of the bait and make your standard fillet. You will end up with one standard fillet and then the other half of the fish which will be pretty thick and still has the backbone attached. I do not skin the fillet – you want the skin intact because it helps hold the piece of bait on the hook.



Step Two: Cut up the thinner fillet into strips about 1" wide and about 3" long. You don't have to remove the scales (some people do but I don't think it matters). Cutting up the fillet with the scales still on can be a chore with a knife. I use a Cabela's Game Shears which makes the whole process effortless. This picture shows what that fillet looks like when it has been cut up.



Now you need to deal with the rest of the fish. Cut off the head and the tail. If you are going to fish for flatheads you will want to save the head. When flatheads are feeding heavily during the pre-spawn they will take cut bait and a big juicy head is one of the best pieces of bait for a hungry flathead.

Step Three: Now you will have a very thick and heavy fillet left. This is where the game shears is worth its weight in gold. It will cut through that thick fillet, the backbone and all the other bones to make some great cut bait chunks. I leave as much of the gut attached to the chunks as I can. You want lots of blood and juices attached to the pieces as possible. Here is a picture of the final product:



Put it on the hook and you are ready to go. Be careful that the point of the hook has not picked up any of the thick scales from the sucker. I normally fish a piece of cut bait like this for about 15 – 20 minutes and then put on a fresh piece so that there is always a good scent trail going into the water.



Get set for a fierce strike. I fish my cut bait on circle hooks and set the rods in rod holders. The channel cats will hammer this bait and hook themselves. You will have a tussle just trying to get the rod out of the holder.