

Shad, shad,
The magical lure.
Other fish love it
And eat it for sure!

Ok, so I am no poet. I am also not rich. When I heard that a chunk of shad behind a hoochy could catch ocean Coho, I had to give it a try. Lets face it Herring has gotten really expensive. The high demand for herring with the good salmon fisheries we have had in the past few years has not only driven up prices, it has also driven up herring harvest. Good herring bait has actually been scarce from time to time.

Shad on the other hand is extremely plentiful, fun to catch, and pretty darn inexpensive if you catch it yourself. In fact it was the idea of jigging for my own herring for bait that lead to trying out shad. I asked Dale Reiber and John Ward how to go about catching herring when I was at Coos Bay to review their STEP projects. They explained "We don't bother with herring. It gets too soft when you catch and freeze your own. Besides we have good luck with shad." They didn't go into much detail. There was not much detail to it. They simply used a chunk of shad the same way people use a plug cut or chunk of herring behind a hoochy. That's all there is to it.

Shad is a member of the herring family and a very oily member at that. I have been stacking shad in the freezer each spring for years to use as crab bait. Shad keeps extremely well in the freezer. Wrap each one whole in a plastic grocery bag and stack them in the freezer like bricks. The bag prevents them from freezing together and the fish's slime layer prevents freezer burn. (There is no need to vacuum pack this bait.) Nothing catches more dungenous crab than shad. It is also the "go to" bait for giant Sturgeon below Bonneville Dam. But for Salmon? To say the least, I was skeptical. After all, if it was really all that good why was everybody buying herring?

I had to give it a try. The allure of free bait was just too strong to be denied. My first day fishing the ocean was July 5th. We crossed the bar with our crab traps and shad for both crab and salmon. Of course we also had a good supply of herring. Our rods were rigged in the traditional way for this time of year. The divers were followed immediately by a triangle flasher or a short leader with a dodger. Dodgers are followed by a short 2 foot leader to the hoochy while the flasher gets a leader about twice that long. The leader is tied with 5/0 debarbed hooks. This may sound like too big a hook for Coho but it helps insure the hookup takes place forward in the mouth while smaller hooks can be taken deeper which could be fatal to wild released fish. I don't believe the larger hooks prevented any hookups.



Two big Chinook and 18 Coho caught on shad one day in August.



Shad just caught for an evening of sturgeon fishing

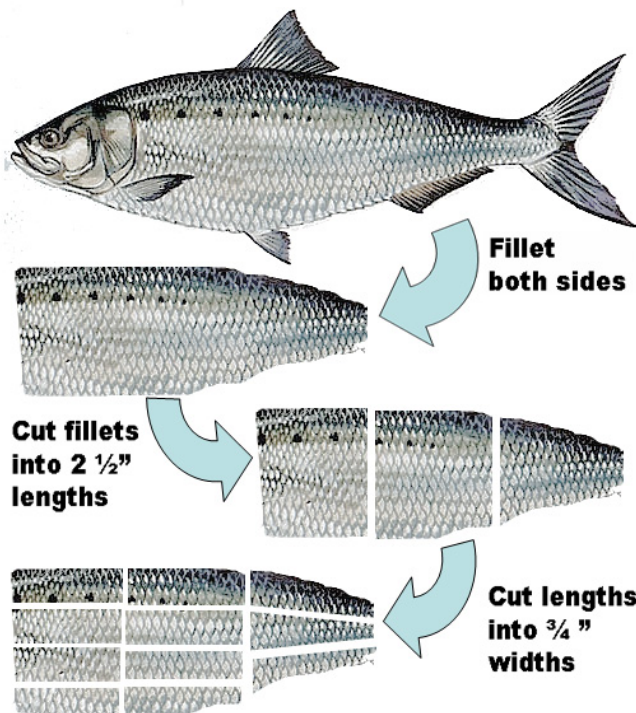
We baited half the rods with a plug cut herring and the other half with a strip of shad. Water temp was a bit high at 58 degrees but we were into fish almost immediately. By the time we had released a few and bonked a few it was obvious. Shad was out-catching herring by about two to one and nobody wanted to use herring any more. We released a few more to finish off our limit – all on shad. And so it went through the rest of the month. Different anglers went out with me each time and I needed to bring herring along for the skeptics. There never was a skeptic by the end of the day.

One of my fishing buddies mentioned hearing of another angler landing a halibut on a shad head. Why not? We had an “all depth” halibut day in mid July and I decided to give it a try. Again we took out our traditional baits but this time we also had shad fillets in the bait cooler. It was a good choice. We started with just one rod using shad but ended the day with our entire limit being caught with shad. One fish at over 70 pounds was the largest halibut ever landed on my boat.

Shad is a great bait. It not only entices bites, it also stays on the hook better than just about anything else when set up correctly. One good size shad provides the equivalent of about two dozen herring.

Start by filleting the sides off the back bone, cutting through the ribs. Put the head and spine aside for crab bait. Cut the fillet into about 2 ½ inch lengths. Cut these lengths into strips about ¾ inch to 1 inch wide. This should provide you with about a dozen baits that have a skin side dimension of roughly 2 ½ inch by ¾ inch. The skin is very important. It is as tough as leather. While the meat is relatively delicate and will not hold a hook, it does stay attached to the skin.

Insert the top hook of your two hook mooching leader into one end of the bait from the meat side and through the skin. I like to pass the trailing hook through the center and allow it to dangle just beyond the end of the bait. Others just let the trailing hook dangle from the top hook.

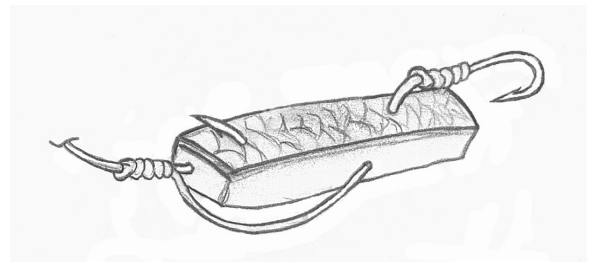


Just one Shad will provide about two dozen baits!



This 72 pound halibut is just one of a limit caught on Shad out of Tillamook in late July.

By the end of the “south of cape falcon” ocean Coho season my boat had seen 31 angler days of fishing on 14 trips. We landed a total 151 Chinook, Coho, and a steelhead. Only a few Coho had been landed with herring while the rest took shad. Catching shad for bait is a lot of fun, particularly if you take kids fishing with you. So save your money and put away a few shad for the next salmon season.



A strip of Shad on a two hook mooching leader for use below a hoochy (rubber squid skirt).