

Drifting Bait: Inside and outside by Jon Merrill ~ [www.marshmarauders.org](http://www.marshmarauders.org)

Here's a few tips I learned from growing up fishing the local marsh. Growing up, weight always seemed to be part of the equation. As I got older, into my teens and more daring, I decided to try different approaches to fishing the tidal skinny water rivers and creeks. I soon learned that "dead sticking" bait was, in most cases, for surf fishermen. I started to use the tidal water to my advantage and "drift" my presentations down into the ruts and trenches created by the tides hitting the soil and bouncing off the banks, thus the water being redirected to the side (an "eddy"). After lots of practice, and plenty of weird looks from onlookers lol, I soon realized that this was not only a very productive technique, but also more active and more fun for me. When plugs wont produce, and there's no live bait within reach, drifting chunks of herring is always a back-up plan for me. Casting a chunk out into the middle of a current, and trying your best to "track" the bait while it drifts down, and following it with rod tip while cupping the reel with your free hand as you allow line to slowly be given to the water is the best way to start. Always make sure to leave just a smidgen of slack behind the bait. When you believe it's close to drifting by, or through, the strike zone, close the bail. I have often had very sudden and violent hits before my bait has even reached the strike zone, or, the "trench". I will always allow my bait to drift a bit past the targeted strike zone a little as well before reeling in fer another cast.

I have also had many fish hit moving bait. Yes, fish pounding a chunk of herring that I am reeling in over a rock bed or a mussel bed. Over the past several years, I have learned even more about this chunk drifting, and I have come to a conclusion that fish really do love "tumbling bait". While everyone else is doing the "sit and watch" approach to fishing the estuaries, I am more often than not drifting, because I find that it is a much more natural presentation to the fish when they see the food tumbling down to them with the tide as they lay in wait.

Ofcourse, I often do the "sit and wait" out in the marsh these days when I feel like lounging with a 6-pack! Nuttin' wrong with that sometimes!

I have many that can attest to this technique, including a local avid fly fisherman who lives in Hampton. I met him a few years ago, and one afternoon while fishing one of my old school spots, he noticed I was ahead in our little "fishing derby", 6-zip. His flies were not producing on this overcast afternoon. Soon after him getting a little frustrated, I recommended to him that he "take a break from all the whippin' of the flies and all that castin'" LOL. He said "yeah, what the hell, pass me a hook". And so it began.....Fly Dave soon had one of my blood red 5/0 hooks on the end of his fly line, and he asked if he could have some bait, and I said ofcourse. He began "driftin'", and the derby was soon tied. As I sat, drank a coldie, and watched him laugh like a little kid as he scored half-a-dozen fish inside 20 minutes or so. Soon after that, he got into a tussle with decent fish that ended up being a few ticks under 19 pounds. Not bad for a fly rod with some

herrin' on the end.

So if ya fish tidal skinny water a lot like meself, and have never tried this technique, I recommend it highly. Takes some practice, but taking off the weight and the fishfinder rig can in some instances and situations produce some more fish, and fun for ya, especially if those "spots" you always thought looked "good" were never quite in reach of a cast.

During big tides, I will sometimes use small egg sinkers to help get the bait down a bit into the water column. No bank sinkers or pyramids, etc. Egg sinkers. These tumble through the water column and over mussel beds etc, this is good!

Ready to hit the shore with this technique? Yup, it works out front too.

Except this time, with mackerel! First an explanation to why herring is preferred in the rivers over macks.....to some it's not quite that obvious, I have had people see me land multiple fish while drifting the river, and they will ask what I am using for presentation. They are most often using Mackerel, and if they are nice, I will explain to them that herring will out fish macks about 20-1 in the rivers because the Bass never see macks "up inside", the Mackerel turn white and go belly-up if they reach the lower salinity of a tidal marsh. They are best suited for outside fishing, or just inside a harbor and/or on the flats. Any further up and they wont produce as much, at least around here lol. Even line lining in low salinity is short-lived, as macks don't last long. Bass love Herring/Alewives in the rivers, that's what they see around here, and that's what they target.

Now, out front, Mack is ripe. 7/0 or 8/0 circle sea hook, a 50 series baitrunner, and nice surfcasting rod can make for some fun fishing. Find a rockbed, point, or "bowl" formed by rocks, and you will certainly find some larger class fish, with some patience. Try drifting at least half a Mackerel, no weight, over the rock bed. I like to catch the outgoing, and follow the tide down, but either tide can produce. Some people are surprised to see no weight on my rig, but Macks cast well! And they stay on the hook much better than a Herring, as we all know. Drifting BIG chunks and whole Macks can produce some quality fish. Patience is key, you may not see the numbers, but you will be rewarded with size. Big bait = big fish. This is a great rule to follow, and almost none are more true. Just think about it, does a big ol' Bassy wanna compete with the lil schoolies for small bait? NAW! Think big! Give that big ol' gal something to move on!

I hope this drifting produces some quality fish for anyone who takes it on.

Sometimes it's a great "Plan B". I have sometimes plugged for hours with nary a hit, then drifted and on the first several drifts/passes scored fish.

Sometimes they just want FOOD.....

Tackle:

Inside (marshes/rivers)

7' or 8.5' light or medium power, moderate or fast action rod

40 series reel (preferably a baitrunner model)

15-20# test

10-15# Flourocarbon leader

3/0 to 6/0 circle or octopus hook

20 or 30 pound barrel swivel

Palomar knots!

Outside (along the coast, rocky shores, rock beds, beaches etc)  
8.5' – 10' Surf rod  
20 or 30 pound Fireline (depending on structure, etc)  
15# or 25# Flourocarbon leader (see above)  
50 series reel. Preferably a baitrunner model  
7/0 to 8/0 red circle sea hooks  
40 or 50 pound barrel swivel  
Palomar knots!

