





FISH AND TIPS

With the Atlantic Ocean crossing season looming, Jenevora Swann shares some tips on how to get ready for offshore fishing, without breaking the bank

Fishing offshore adds an extra dimension to passage making, not only can it provide a healthy and delicious source of protein, but it's also good fun for the whole crew to get involved with and encourages camaraderie and banter.

There's also something really quite satisfying about being able to catch and cook your own food.

Fergus, my husband, has been river fishing since he was a young boy, but when we got our boat, he found offshore fishing required different skills and tactics. There is nothing sporting about our approach to trolling, (trying to catch a fish by pulling a baited line through the water behind a boat) it's all about filling the freezer without having to slow the boat downwind.





Here are Fergus' top tips for offshore fishing

Basic equipment

With offshore fishing, we quickly found that running downwind, using rods and reels, was just a good way to lose lures, line and, in one tussle with a shark, the whole rod! In a decent trade wind, slowing the boat is difficult, so even a mid-size tuna can quickly strip all the line off your reel.

Then we were introduced to Cuban YoYo's (handlines), which we load up with heavy weight monofilament line or paracord; 200 or 300lbs monofilament is our preference. This is attached to braided steel leaders and daisy-chain squid lures.

We are not aiming to catch enormous fish, so we size the leader and hooks accordingly. If a shark or huge tuna hits our lure then we will lose the hook and not the whole line.

It's so simple, inexpensive and effective, and they take up hardly

any space when not being used. The only maintenance is a spray off with fresh water after use and occasionally checking the crimps and knots, or changing a rusted hook. We probably don't hook as many fish using this method, but we definitely land more, which is what counts.

Some additional equipment is important such as a suitably sized gaff to allow safe landing of the fish, a big bucket, strong cut-proof gloves, a way to make an alarm such as a pet bell, crimps and swivels for joining the lure and leader to the line, and a sharp knife for filleting.

Additionally you can rig some bungee or surgical rubber to make a shock absorber but, as monofilament stretches considerably, we tended not to bother. Run the lure about two to three boat lengths' behind, ideally so you can see it surfing down the front of a wave. At the boat end, wrap the line around a cleat and then use a piece of paracord to tie the YoYo to a secure point.

PREVIOUS PAGE
Reeling in a marlin, lifejacket on and clipped onto the boat

ABOVE LEFT
Cuban YoYo and Lure

ABOVE RIGHT
Dan Bower from *Skyelark 2* catching a tuna using a toothpaste tube

BELOW LEFT
A selection of well used fishing lures

FACING PAGE
Fergus catches a marlin

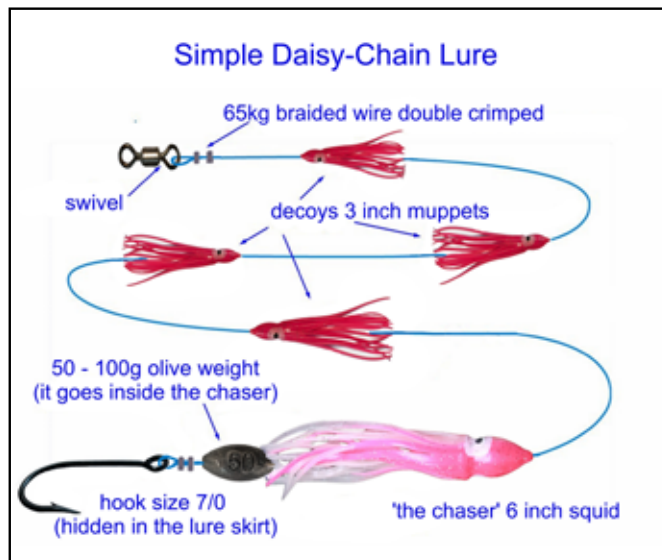
Taking the bait

Like the tackle used for fishing, lures can be super cheap or hugely expensive. At their simplest, a couple of empty toothpaste tubes work well, which our friend Dan Bower on *Skyelark 2* swears by, or you can spend £80 on a single lure from one of the big game fishing companies.

Our preference is to make fake squid daisy-chain lures in various colours, but pink and blue are our favourites. We use the daisy-chain method to increase visibility for the fish while only using one hook at the end for safety.

The ideal speed for trolling offshore is 6-8kts, but we have caught fish both going faster and slower. The best times are around sunrise or sunset or, as is normally the case if sailing double-handed, it's whenever the other one is off-watch and has just fallen asleep!

Offshore fish you may encounter on a trans-Atlantic include a variety of tuna species,





Offshore fishing



wahoo, mahi mahi and billfish such as marlin or sailfish, all of which are delicious to eat.

Closer to shore, you may also catch Spanish mackerel, kingfish and barracuda, which must be treated with caution, depending on where you are in the world, as they can carry ciguatera poisoning. As a general rule of thumb, we did not eat barracuda and handled bill fish only when we had to.

Retrieving the fish

The advantage of using a YoYo with heavy weight monofilament is, in most cases, you won't need to slow the boat down to drag the fish in. This is especially important when sailing downwind short handed using poled-out sails or spinnakers, which could make slowing the boat difficult.

While dragging in and landing a fish, it's safety first, so wear a life jacket and be clipped on. Also a good idea is to wear fishing gloves, ideally cut resistant. A sturdy pair of gardening gloves will also suffice.

To bring a fish in using a YoYo reel, don't let the line pool at your feet, it's better to roll it onto the YoYo using a figure of eight motion and your hand as a line guide. For really big fish, you can employ a winch.

To land a fish, it's easiest done using a gaff or, in some instances, a thin line around the tail, can also work well. Team work comes into play here as one person holds the line and another gaffs the fish.

Quickly dispatch the fish by pouring a shot or two of cheap spirits (gin or vodka) into its gills. This method reduces mess on board and does not spoil the meat with undue stress.

How to prepare the fish

Gut the fish by cutting the belly from in front of the pectoral fin to the anus, and remove all the innards.

Smaller fish can then be wrapped in tin foil with some herbs or placed directly on a BBQ or baked. If thick loined, it's worth slicing into the fish to ensure even cooking.

Larger fish are best chopped into steaks by cutting from head to tail in one inch cross sections. This will work well until you master the art of filleting, which is preferable as you end up with no bones.

Once caught and processed, fish will keep in the fridge for three to five days, or up to three months in a freezer. When freezing, best to place the filleted fish into ziplock bags and remove as much of the air as possible or vacuum seal before freezing. Don't forget to name and date the bags.

ABOVE LEFT

Fergus catches a Mahi Mahi

ABOVE RIGHT

Sunset fishing

BELOW

Fergus cooks fish on the beach in the Tuamotus, French Polynesia



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jenevora Swann and her husband Fergus Dunipace were liveaboards on their catamaran *Two Drifters* for eight years. They sailed halfway around the world from Greece to Australia before pausing their circumnavigation in 2022. Facebook.com/TwoDriftersTravel / TwoDriftersTravel.com

Catch it, cook it

Store cupboard staples we always have on board for cooking fish are ginger, sesame seeds, soy, lemon or lime juice, garlic, butter, capers, creole and old bay spices, dill and parsley.

Our favourite recipes, which we loved cooking on *Two Drifters*, include:

- Carpaccio – in order to cut the fish really thinly, lightly freeze the fillet before slicing; then thaw and season with a pinch of salt and lemon juice.
- Sashimi – any freshly caught tuna, with particular focus on yellowfin, bluefin and albacore, will make great sashimi or sushi and is delicious to eat within hours of being caught. Just add a little soy and wasabi, or lime juice.
- Poisson Cru – where small cubes of raw fish are mixed with fresh vegetables such as cucumber, tomato and onion and then placed in a juice of lime, coconut milk and salt and pepper.
- BBQ in tin foil with garlic, butter and white wine (of course, if sailing offshore on a 'dry' boat, you can substitute white wine with stock and lemon juice).
- BBQ or pan sear after marinating in soy, lime, honey and ginger with a dusting of sesame seeds.
- The absolute best way to enjoy fish is to marinate it simply in salt, pepper, lime, and cook it over a fire on a deserted beach. Invite your cruising buddies over, and share it along with a fishy tale or two of your travels!

Additional reading

The Cruiser's Handbook for Fishing by Scott Bannerot, is an excellent guide on all aspects of fishing from a boat and covers in detail how to clean, portion and store your catch. ✦



