

Grass Shrimp and How to Catch Your Own by Keith Lockwood, MD DNR

Many anglers who fish Chesapeake Bay waters for white perch know grass shrimp make excellent bait. You can buy them at bait & tackle shops or with a little effort catch your own. There are two major species in our regions of the bay, *Palaemonetes vulgaris* and *Palaemonetes pugio*, *pugio* is the most common found in Maryland's portion of the Chesapeake. There is a third species that is found at the mouth of the bay, *Crangon septemspinosa*, that is commonly called sand shrimp. All make excellent bait.



One of the easiest and most efficient ways to catch common grass shrimp is to use a fine mesh dip net with a long handle. A flat faced frame net is the most efficient since you will often be pulling the net through grass or along a bulkhead that is covered with heavy fouling. If the netting wraps around the frame, it will soon be worn down. If you have this type of net, taking a piece of tubing, slitting it lengthwise and fitting it over the net frame face can help.



The best shrimp nets have the netting on the inside of the frame to avoid abrasion. They can be found at some of our larger tackle shops, but a recent scouting mission found that only one net was on display in each shop, and they had a short handle. They can also be found on the internet but again with a short handle. This can be solved by finding something to extend the handle length, in my case, a drapery rod fit perfectly.



Grass shrimp are most often found in thick shallow grass, and marsh edges. One trick that can also work well is to find bulkheads that are covered with a lot of fouling. Small feeder creeks are an excellent place to look for grass shrimp. They can also be caught in a minnow trap, but this method is not as effective. Once collected they can be kept in an insulated bucket with an aerator or on wet newspaper with ice packs underneath and a thin wet towel on

top. Using a spray bottle with bay water in it helps to keep them moist by spraying periodically.

Grass shrimp are candy to white perch and during the late spring and summer months fishing off docks and piers with moderately deep water beneath is a wonderful way to fish for white perch. A simple single hook bottom rig with a #4 hook rigged to be 6½ to 8½ off the bottom and fished straight down near dock piers is a winning method, as are small jig heads tipped with a grass shrimp. Fishing with fresh grass shrimp is one of the best ways one could think of to introduce our youngest anglers to fishing, no casting needed just straight down and up.

