

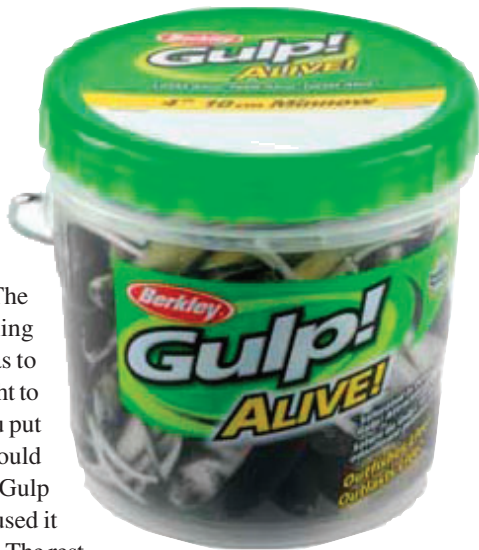
Berkley Gulp! Alive

Web: www.berkley-fishing.com

Phone: 800-237-5539

Price: 19.99 (17.7-oz belly strips)

I have always been of the opinion that bottom fish have the brain the size of an acorn and are therefore pretty unsophisticated. The name of the game in bottom fishing for fluke and sea bass, I thought, was to find the fish and use the proper weight to get the bait down to them. Once you put something in front of them, they would hit it. I first witnessed the power of Gulp on a party boat when one guy who used it out-fished the entire boat by himself. The rest of the boat was using squid, and, if the Gulp could out-fish squid, then I had to get some to try it out myself. Sometimes, my timing is serendipitous, because two days later, a large shipment of Gulp arrived at our office from Pure Fishing. After a full season of fishing exclusively with Gulp, I will never buy frozen squid again for bottom fishing. It's no gimmick – there's something in the "sauce" that drives bottom fish crazy. What's even better is that Gulp is durable, usually lasting at least 3 to 4 fish before it needs to be replaced. It is also resistant to small scup's menacing little jaws, so you don't have to constantly waste time and bait on these undersized fish. I usually fish Gulp on an Eagle Claw "fluke rig" for both fluke and sea bass. The chartreuse and hot pink colors with grub tails were my favorite, but all colors and sizes produced well. Gulp comes in a big recloseable drum that holds enough bait for many trips. Just keep it on the boat – there's no need to refrigerate it. It's a great way to increase your catch, save money on bait, and lessen the aggravation associated with caring for bait.



St. Croix Legend Surf Rod

Web: www.stcroixrods.com

Phone: 715-762-3226

Price: \$430

The first time I put my hands on the 10-foot, 6-inch St Croix Legend, three thoughts occurred to me. Initially, I was blown away by how light it was. Next, I looked at their unique X-grip handle and was amazed that we don't see more grips like this. Lastly I looked at the Fuji low rider guides and realized I had not seen a production rod built like this before. This was a rod I needed to fish.

I have the LSS106MM2 model, which is a 10-foot, 6-inch rod rated to throw lures from 3/4-ounce to 4 ounces. I never thought a 10-and-a-half-foot rod would be my day-to-day plugging stick, but thanks to its high modulus, lightweight graphite, my body takes far less abuse from a day's worth of plugging with the Legend as opposed to my regular 9-foot "Jersey" rod. I was also surprised at how well such a long rod could cast slim-profile lures, like Bombers. I have effectively fished everything from small, plastic minnow-style baits of barely an ounce to 3 1/2-ounce PlugCaster Pencil Poppers. For all its featherweight finery and casting finesse, the Legend Surf puts up a solid wall of strength when a bigger fish comes calling, and I highly recommend this rod.

Local Hooker Composite Spinning Rod

Web: www.localhookerrods.com

Phone: 508-548-1213

Price: \$235 (7-foot, rated 3/4- to 2-ounce)

On one of his recent visits to the On The Water office, I asked Bob Jenkins, owner of Local Hooker Rods, what rod he would recommend for someone like me who wanted a heavy, fast-action spinning rod capable of handling 50-pound-test braided line and lures up to 3 ounces. I told him that I wanted a boat rod that offered versatility and excellent functionality for a wide array of applications and fish species. Bob said, "I know just what

you need," left the office and took off in his truck. Two hours later, Bob reappeared with two models of his 7-foot Composite Spinning rod and let me borrow both for a field test. After an entire season of use, I was very impressed by both versions of the rod. I fished them with Quantum Cabo reels in the 40 and 60 size, and 30- and 50-pound-test Tuf Line. The rod balanced both size reels equally well, speaking to its versatility. Whether casting 3/4-ounce Deadly Dicks for albies or 3-ounce plugs or eels for stripers, the Local Hooker Composite Spinning Rod was always comfortable to use and impressively lightweight. I would be confident steaming out of port with the 7-foot Local Hooker Composite Spinning rod being the only inshore rod I had on the boat, knowing it would be up to the task of tackling just about any fish species I encountered that day.

Lonely Angler 1-Ounce Enhanced Tail Pencil

Web: www.lonelyangler.com

Phone: 240-350-0183

Price: \$11.00

Pencil poppers are one of my favorite lures to fish from the surf, as their splashy side-to-side motion draws exciting topwater strikes from bass and bluefish. However, pencil poppers are tough to fish from a boat, where heaving around a 2- to 3-ounce lure with two sets of trebles is generally not a good idea. The Lonely Angler pencil is a lightweight topwater plug rigged with one single hook, making it perfect for tossing on a 7-foot boat rod. The shape of the 6-inch lure makes it easy to work with a splashy side-to-side retrieve, but it can also be worked slowly for a more subtle gliding action that is deadly for attracting a follow-up strike. The plug is back weighted and casts like a dream, which means you can reach schools of bass and blues feeding on the surface before you spook them with the boat. The hardware on this plug may not hold up to a cow striper, but it makes catching and releasing school-sized stripers a blast.

Hogy Swimbait Hook

Web: www.hogylures.net

Phone: 508-444-8764

Price: \$6.95 (2-pack)

Soft-plastic stickbaits are all the rage for striper fishing, but rigging them right can be tricky. Rig one straight on an offset worm hook, and you have a surface/sub-surface lure that will zig, zag, dart, flutter and even splash on top. Rig one just a little crooked, and it will only spin and twist. The Hogy Swim Bait hook uses a screw eye to hold the nose of the bait, so you don't have to worry about trying to line up the bait as you thread the hook through. Instead, just hold the screw eye and twist the nose of the soft bait onto it. Push the point of the hook through the body of the bait, and you have a perfectly rigged bait every time.

Hogy Swim Bait hooks use strong 10/0 hooks big enough for 7- to 14-inch soft baits. The bait-keeper holds the bait securely, while the tapered weighted portion acts like a keel and adds just enough weight (about 1/3 ounce) to give the bait a deadly subsurface "walk the dog" action.

