



# TONS OF TUNA

By: Peter Miller

Florida offers tons of fishing opportunities for tuna. There are several different varieties of tuna including yellowfin, blackfin, skipjack, and bluefin that can be found on both coasts of Florida. The two most commonly targeted species are yellowfin and blackfin. Tuna are known for their incredible fighting ability, as well as, being fantastic table fare.

While not typically targeted by casual anglers, for recreational anglers there are many options throughout the state for hooking up with tuna. The most prevalent tuna in Florida is the blackfin. Blackfin rarely grow larger than 30 pounds, however, what they lack in size they make up for in quantity and aggressiveness. Anglers across the state find blackfin closest to shore especially during fall and spring seasons. There always seems to be a time during the summer where blackfin tuna seemingly disappear as they move into waters further offshore to spawn. Florida Keys anglers know blackfin frequent the edges of the reefs around schools of baitfish.

Trolling is by far the most effective method for targeting blackfin and the venerable cedar plug is tops among lures when searching for them. Blackfin also respond very well to live baits or natural dead baits slow trolled near current edges and rips. Another interesting way to target blackfin in the Gulf of Mexico is to fish near anchored shrimp boats as they clean their bycatch, creating a massive chum slick and a veritable smorgasbord for passing tuna. Tackle for blackfin need not be on the heavy side. Medium to medium-heavy rods

will provide more sport to the pint-size brawlers. The blackfin's penchant for taking lures and baits off the surface usually means nothing more is needed than a 40- to 50-pound leader and a stout circle hook.

Yellowfin tuna, while not as prevalent, are certainly a targeted species in Florida's waters. Anglers find yellowfin much further offshore than other species of tuna. Panhandle anglers venture far offshore in search of monster yellowfin—some well over 100 pounds. In the Gulf, anglers have found fishing near the edge of the Loop Current produces the best results. Unlike the lighter tackle used for blackfin, yellowfin tuna are known for destroying less-than-adequate gear.

Yellowfin tackle usually starts in the 30-pound-class range and moves upward into the 80-pound-class range. Large, conventional reels paired with stout trolling rods are the norm, however, many anglers are taking advantage of jigging and popping techniques with stand-up gear. Yellowfin tuna love to strike brightly colored trolling lures dragged in front of a fresh ballyhoo. They can also be chummed close to the boat by a method called "chunking" in which chunks of live bait are tossed overboard, bringing the often wary tuna close enough to catch.

For Florida tuna anglers, one of the biggest benefits of a good day tuna fishing shows up on the dinner plate. There truly is no way to describe the taste of a tuna so fresh it was swimming mere hours before being grilled, seared, or broiled. **GAFF**