



## Fantastic Plastics—Deadly on Anything

BY JEFF MERRILL

Here's a soft approach that provides solid results for inshore and offshore gamefish.

Soft baits play a vital part of any saltwater angler's arsenal. They offer the look, feel and action of live and natural baits and are very effective for numerous inshore and offshore species. Soft baits are available in a wide range of shapes, styles and colors and depending on the type employed can be deadly addition to a bucktail or leadhead jig or when

used alone as strip or hook bait. Unlike metal or hard plastic lures, soft baits are also less likely to discourage a second or third bite as they feel more life-like to a gamefish. Whether casting for bonefish on a grassy flat or targeting striped bass from a sandy beach, there's a soft bait to match most angling techniques and species sought. Each offers many of the

characteristics of natural bait including life-like color, shape, action and feel and nearly all can be sprayed or injected with fish attractant for added fish-catching capability.

From shrimp and crabs to sandworms and eels, most manufacturers offer a soft plastic bait to match just about any forage species. One of the most popular is the soft plastic tail that's marketed under several names including D.O.A. Jerk Bait and D.O.A. Shad Tail. Though they have a wide range of applications, adding a soft plastic tail to a leadhead, chug head or bucktail jig takes your fishing potential to a whole new level. Designed to be used at all levels of the water column from topwater to bottom, soft tails are available in every color imaginable to match any species of gamefish regardless of where your travels take you. Whether your quarry is gator trout and snook in Florida's backwaters, speckled trout and puppy drum along one of the sounds of North Carolina's Outer Banks or school-sized striped bass and doormat summer flounder off New Jersey, a soft plastic tail offers color and action gamefish can't resist. On the off-shore grounds, soft tails can be deadly when cast to floating debris where mahi-mahi hide or while retrieved through a chum line when school bluefin or blackfin tuna, false albacore and bonito are targeted. Though toothy critters such as bluefish also find soft tails tasty, I prefer hard baits when targeting that species for obvious reasons.

Leadhead jigs play a vital part in the effectiveness of any soft tail. They not only get the jig to the desired depth but also offer fish-attracting features such as color and eyes to help an artificial bait look life-like. Catalogs and tackle shops are crammed with many sizes, shapes, styles and colors from various manufacturers and I've tried many but have found those made by D.O.A. Lures of Stuart, Florida ([www.doalures.com](http://www.doalures.com)) to be among the best. They're available in a wide range of colors with long or short-shank extra-sharp Eagle Claw hooks to match soft baits of various sizes and offer a durable finish that won't chip, crack, peel or fade after heavy use on rocky bottom, sandy flats and grassy channels. D.O.A. Jig Heads are available in sizes ranging from 1/16 to one-ounce and a feature I really like is the double barb on the head which holds the plastic tail securely in place. Even if you miss a bite, the tail stays in place and is positioned properly for a second strike during retrieve.

I use braid on nearly all my inshore spinning and conventional outfits and although I was hesitant at first after hearing all the horror stories of wind knots and knot tying issues, I've found newer braids are less apt to wind knot and with a little practice, adding a monofilament leader is quick and easy with an Albright Knot. Braids offer better sensitivity and abrasion resistance than monofilament while also casting further since the line flows through rod guides easier. Braids also offer a higher breaking strength than monofilament of the same diameter and there's absolutely no stretch when hooking a fish. To any reel that's spooled with braid I'll typically add about a five-foot monofilament



Toothy critters such as sharks may ruin your soft bait but the thrill of the catch is well worth it.

leader for attaching my leadhead jig with a loop knot.

The most enjoyable part of using leadhead jigs and soft baits is feeling the bite during retrieve. For most species all that's required is a simple cast and allowing the leadhead to sink to the bottom. A light lift of the rod tip as line is retrieved will add a bit of action to the soft bait as it moves from the bottom to the surface and it's important to match the speed of retrieve to species sought. Bottom feeders such as summer flounder require a slow retrieve when compared to more aggressive predators such as snook, trout and striped bass. In all cases, be prepared as soon as the jigs hits the water as most gamefish find soft baits irresistible. Adding soft baits and leadhead jigs to your tackle box will produce positive results. ❖



Most gamefish find the action and color of soft plastic baits irresistible.

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