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**Agricultural Center**  
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## TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR LIVE BAIT ALIVE

by

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This factsheet is intended to cover the basics of handling live bait. Proper handling of live bait will insure that the live bait is lively when it is to be used for luring your prey. The first consideration is water quality. A number of water quality requirements should be considered. These are oxygen, temperature, and salinity.

**OXYGEN:** It is important to insure an adequate oxygen supply. This can be accomplished by several methods. The most popular method is to use a 12-volt aerator that sits inside of the bait well. Another method is to use time-released oxygen tablets that release oxygen into the water. An external pump is available and recommended because it will reduce heat buildup in the water which can kill your bait.

**TEMPERATURE & SALINITY:** Temperature and salinity should be considered next. If possible, you should fill your bait well or bucket with the same water the bait was being held in when purchased. If this is not possible, you may acclimate the bait to the water at the site of the fishing location by adding small quantities of water until the desired temperature and salinity are reached. This is especially important if there is a large temperature and salinity difference. Rapid changes in water temperature and salinity, more than 5 degrees and ten parts per thousand, can cause temperature shock and osmotic stress. Remember, cooler water holds more oxygen than warm water. Cooling the water with ice will cool the water and not reduce the salinity too much. Caution should be taken when adding ice to the water, as too much ice will chill your bait too fast and kill it. These steps may seem unnecessary but, if these steps are not taken, your bait will die much sooner.

**HANDLING:** Rough handling of bait can and will cause unnecessary mortalities. This can be overcome by using a dip net to remove bait from the live well and wetting your hands

before hooking the bait. All finfish have a protective mucus -- "slime" coat that protects them from external stress. If this mucus is removed by handling the fish, it can cause the fish to become stressed and die. This also serves as a means of not contaminating the water in which the bait is living. Insect repellent and sunscreen are two sources of contamination for your bait. After time, the concentration of chemicals could build up to levels that will affect the performance of your bait.

**WATER CONDITIONERS:** There are many chemicals available today that can be added to the water. These chemicals promote longevity and reduce stress. Some are for freshwater and others are for saltwater bait. They can help by removing ammonia, chlorine, and surface foam. They also stimulate the natural "slime" coat and harden scales.

**CATCHING YOUR OWN BAIT:** Bait can be captured using cast nets, seines, trawls, or traps. Locating bait is the most significant factor in catching your own bait. One advantage to catching your own bait is certainty of its freshness. A person may use any of the following with their basic fishing license: a seine of one-fourth inch mesh or less and measuring 30 feet or less, cast net less than 8½ feet in diameter, dip nets, and minnow traps (see Louisiana Fishing Regulations). When seining or trawling, make short tows and transfer the bait to holding tanks frequently. The longer the bait stays in the net, the greater the chance of stress and reduced life span.

**HOLDING TANKS:** Many types of tanks are suitable for holding and maintaining live bait. Homemade tanks can be constructed of plastic, fiberglass, and untreated wood. All metals should be avoided when possible. Round tanks are preferred, since bait tends to huddle in the corners of square or rectangular tanks. This is especially true of menhaden (pogies).

#### Specific Tips:

**Worms:** Worms should be kept cool and dry; this is especially true of night crawlers. If the worms are to be held for an extended period of time, a commercial bedding should be used rather than soil.

**Crickets:** Crickets should be kept dry. If you intend to keep them for more than a day, it is recommended that a potato be cut and placed in the cage. This will supply them with moisture and food. Either a funnel or an open-top cage can be used; however, the open-top cage holds more crickets and is more convenient.

**Grass Shrimp:** Grass shrimp can be obtained from commercial sources or by pushing a dip net into a grass bed. It is recommended that grass shrimp be placed in cornmeal and kept cool.

**Shiners:** Shiners make excellent bait. They can be either purchased or seined from the wild. Large shiners can be caught using tiny hooks and bread. Shiners need to be held in either a live bait well or trolling bucket.