

Q Why do carp anglers use PVA bags to target fish? I've seen people casting them out on my regular water and can't really understand how such a small packet of feed will work; surely you're decreasing your chances of catching as it's hard for the fish to find?

Tim Covany
Hometown: Tamworth
Age: 47
Favourite species: Tench

A We can tell you Tim that, although we can see where you're coming from, you are very wrong. In the right hands the solid PVA bag is a deadly catcher of carp, and other species – you just need to learn more about it and we're sure you'll be a convert. To get the information you need we spoke to big-fish expert Alan Stagg.



CFA EXPERT

Name: Alan Stagg

Sponsors: Gardner Tackle, Enterprise Tackle, CCMoore

ASK AN EXPERT
Your questions answered



BAG A **BIG** CARP

Get to grips with PVA and you'll be bringing bigger carp to the bank in no time.

ALL YEAR ROUND

Because with a solid bag you're fishing for one bite, one fish, the PVA bag is a great year-round method. "In summer it's great to be able to cast into weed, knowing your rig will still work and you'll have good presentation," says Alan. "In winter it's also a great approach to use smaller bags and cast around to find where the fish are."



The PVA bag has become a bit of a go-to presentation for carpers over recent years. In terms of bait presentation it's pretty much unbeatable. You're essentially placing your hook bait slap bang on top of a pile of feed, meaning that once a carp comes across your bait and starts feeding the chances of you getting a take are massively high – but there's a bit more to it than that.

One man who knows the genius of the solid PVA bag (solid referring to the bags being solid rather than mesh) is Gardner Tackle's Alan Stagg. We caught up with him at the prolific Thorpe Lea Fishery, just outside Egham in Surrey, to see what he had to say...

"For bait and rig presentation it's very hard to beat what a PVA bag can offer you," states Alan. "Once you get the knack of tying one sorted you will be able to cast them pretty much anywhere to deliver a very compact patch of feed, which will draw the fish in and have them feeding over what is basically a food backdrop to the cherry on the cake – your hook bait."

At the heart of how a solid PVA bag works is the bag itself. PVA, or polyvinyl alcohol as it's less commonly known, has the great properties of being strong and durable when dry, but breaks down when wet. As soon as it touches the water the PVA absorbs the wet stuff, which affects its molecular bonds to the point where it just melts and dissipates into the lake.

The advantages of this are obvious. You can load

QUALITY BAGGING

If you're going to fish a solid PVA bag, the most important thing is to have good-quality bags. With the amount of pressure they get put under when loading, casting and impacting on the water's surface they need to be well made, with good seams that won't let you down. For the job Alan recommends Gardner Tackle's Standard and Mini PVA bags – the sizes allow you to alternate the amount of feed you cast out depending on the venue you're fishing.

up a bag with feed and your rig and cast it to where you want, then in the water the bag dissolves away to reveal a neat pile of feed.

"The key to a successful PVA bag is how you load it," explains Alan. "Not only will you get a neat pile of feed but do it right and you'll also have your rig covered by the feed too, making a very covert presentation."

Tying up a PVA bag for the cameras (see the comprehensive step-by-step guide) Alan takes us through the details that can boost their effectiveness.

FEED

"One of the most important things to remember about your bait is that it shouldn't have water anywhere on it or the bag will start to come apart before you cast, and that will spell disaster," Alan is at pains to point out. "Oils, though, are okay, and my favourite feed for a solid bag is a very oily pellet mix."

Today Alan demonstrates loading his bag using CC Moore's Oily Bag Mix. This is a 4mm pellet mix that's been slightly crushed to give both →

BUILD THE PERFECT PVA BAG



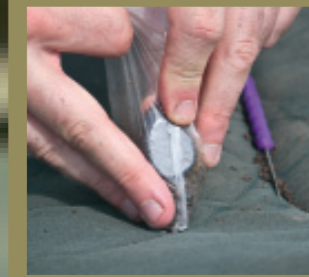
1 Take a PVA bag and nick your hook in the bottom corner. This will ensure the hook bait sits where it's supposed to and stays put on the cast.



2 Load the bag with the crushed-pellet mix to about a quarter full to create a layer over your hook bait.



3 Push the mix down, compacting it and making sure it gets into the corners of the bag.



4 Take your lead and place it on top of the pellets in the opposite corner to the hook – make sure your hook link is tangle-free in the bag.



5 Now add more pellets over the top of the lead, again adding around a quarter of a bag's worth.



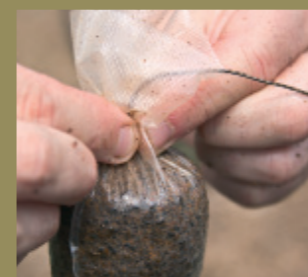
6 Compact the layer over the lead, which will keep it in place and with its position in the bag it will be covered in feed and hidden on the bottom.



7 Looking at the bottom of the bag you should now have your bright hook bait showing at the bottom corner.



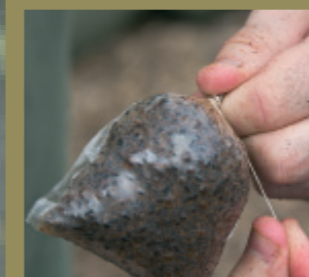
8 Add another layer of mix and compact it until you have a sturdy lump in the bag – leaving enough PVA above the feed to tie the bag up.



9 With the leader from the rig at the centre, pinch the PVA around it and hold it tight.



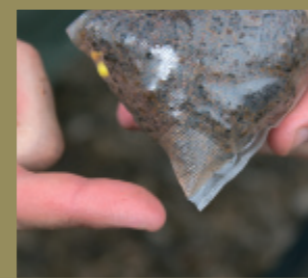
10 Now twist the PVA tight around the leader; at this point a lot of the air will be pushed out of the bag to make it even more compact.



11 Take a 20cm length of PVA string and wrap it around the top of the bag five times to create a tight seal.



12 Tie two overhand knots in the string and trim off the ends.



13 Aerodynamics are very important to cast a bag, so you need to sort out the flaps at the bottom corners.



14 Lightly lick the corners to add moisture to it, but don't overdo it.



15 Now fold the flap over and hold it down – the moisture will make it stick to the main bag.



16 Now trim off the excess PVA at the top of the bag, being careful not to cut your leader, and you're ready for launch.



The ingredients for Alan's perfect PVA-bag mix.



Bright hook baits are the cherry on the top.



pellets and a more grainy element to the feed. "These finer particles of the pellets are perfect for building a good bag as they get into the corners and fill the bag out, plus they stop the pellets moving around so you can really compact it all down, making a very solid bag that will cast much better," he tells us.

One of the most important things with a bag mix, though, is making it attractive enough to draw fish in. As our reader points out it's a very small patch of bait that fish might miss – unless you make it work hard to be irresistible.

"Oil plays a big part in my PVA bag mix and I'll add it to the CC Moore's mix, even though it's oily already," says Alan. "What you

want is this small patch of bait to create a large slick that moves around the water on the tow to draw the fish in and down on to it."

To pep up his pellets, Alan adds a glug of CC Moore's Slicking Boost liquid – only a small glug is needed, as it's potent stuff.

"It's always good to add your oil the night before as it gives it longer to absorb, meaning your pellets will give off a slick for longer, but you can do it on the bank if you want and this works just as well, especially on runs waters where the bites will come quicker," reveals Alan. As well as this he also adds a dose of powdered krill to the mix, which delivers a very potent fishy attraction that the carp love.

HOOK LINK

Use a supple hook link, with uncoated braid being the best choice (Alan opts for Gardner Trickster) as a stiffer hook link will work to push your hook bait away from the tight pile of feed. Use a short hook link of three or four inches as this will be easier to fit in your bag without tangling.

HOOK BAIT

With the feed sorted Alan turns to hook baits, and the rule is the brighter the better. "I go for a dark feed mix so that I can contrast a bright hook bait against it," he explains. "With a bag, what you're doing is fishing for one bite at a time, not looking to introduce a load of feed to an area to build up a swim. Because of this you're playing a bit of a numbers game and ideally you want the carp to take your hook bait before anything else."

To achieve this Alan is looking to figuratively put a very bright and noticeable cherry, which will act like a beacon to the carp, on top of a dark, attractive cake. His favourite hook baits for the job are either a pair of Enterprise fake corn grains or a whittled-down fluoro boilie – both being balanced so that they just waft around above the hook.

Just one of a number of fish that fell to Alan's tactics at the prolific Thorpe Lea.



A well-prepped bag will cast a long way.

