

Hook-bait choice is vital when zigging. Lewis prefers foam.



TOP 10 ZIG TIPS

Master the neglected art of zig rigging and you will catch more carp this spring. Luckily, our expert, **LEWIS READ**, is on hand to show you his best zig edges.



1 WATCH FOR THE HATCH

The obvious time to use zigs is when carp are visible near the surface. It's ideal for fishing a hook bait within a foot of the surface, right in their field of vision. There are also occasions when the fish will be suckers for a mid-water bait.

After the early morning feeding period has passed the majority of fish will only occasionally visit the lake bed to truffle for food. This is due to the natural rise and fall of oxygen levels throughout the day, and the fish will move to bands where the dissolved oxygen and temperature are comfortable for them.

Fly hatches, indicated by gulls sipping at or dapping the surface when insects are emerging, are a great example. Have a look on the windward margin and you can see thousands of empty cases, indicating how vast some of these hatches are.

Watch for birds feeding on hatching insects. The carp won't be far away.



2 FOAM IT UP

Rather than relying on a marker float, it is worth using your knowledge of a venue or particular swim's topography to make an educated guess as to the depth of the water.

It's rarely the case that the depth of the hook bait is critical to a few inches and because the topography of most waters can have considerable variations, I prefer to cast out and feel the lead down, watching the hook bait. If it is only a split second between the hook bait disappearing and the lead touching down, you will know that your bait's near the surface. At long range, or on a breezy day, I normally wrap a piece of white dissolving rig foam around the hook bait to highlight it.



4 USE CLIPS FOR CONVENIENCE

For 99 per cent of my zig-rig fishing I favour a Covert lead clip and a short section of anti-tangle sinking rig tubing.

The lead clip reigns supreme because it allows the quick and convenient change of lead size when the little 1.1oz Bolt Bombs don't offer enough range. The addition of a 12in section of rig tubing really helps to combat tangles around the clip.

Given the added benefit of being able to ditch the lead when necessary in weed, I now use this setup in preference to leadcore leaders (which can cause major tangling) throughout the warmer months because it's a one-stop solution. It also enables me to use hook links that are already made up (and baited) because I use a 3mm rig ring that can be slipped onto a Kwik-Lok swivel and sheathed in an anti-tangle sleeve, which saves loads of time.

Lead clips are the best choice for zigging.



Your tea cup comes in handy when casting.



3 PREVENT TANGLES

We all have a slightly different casting style, but 'whippy' styles that fire the lead out on a low trajectory definitely cause more tangles. Therefore, make a slower, higher cast and feather the lead just before it hits the water.

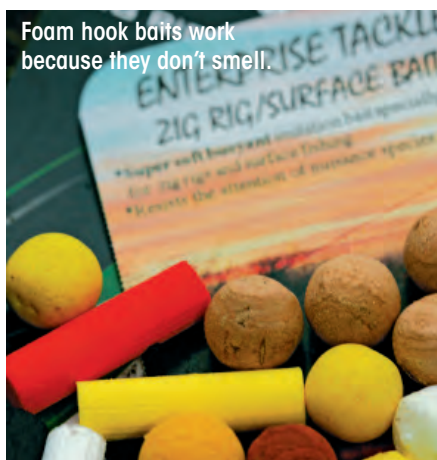
More tips to help reduce tangles happening are:

- Keep line twist on your main line to a minimum (when it builds up use a Spin Doctor).
- Use a short section of sinking rig tubing above your lead setup (this helps with all styles of lead arrangements) and an anti-tangle sleeve on the rig to help create separation between the hook link and the lead/main line.
- Hook on a small piece of dissolving rig foam or a little PVA bag of floaters.
- With long links get somebody to hold the hook bait (or place it in a mug) so that you can get a good drop off the rod tip to the lead. This enables you to make slower, smoother casts.

5 DARE AFTER DARK

It takes a leap of faith to leave your zig-rig hook baits out after dark and it's not until you have success that you realise that we (or should that read I) underestimate the carp's ability to see things in very low light levels. During the first half of the night, when the surface layers are still warm and oxygen levels at the lake bed are falling away, you will find that the fish are still well up from the lake bed. So bait your morning spots ready and have your lines marked but don't be too quick to reel the zigs in because there's still a good chance.

Foam hook baits work because they don't smell.



6 ALWAYS USE FOAM

I rarely use anything but zig foam these days as my hook bait (or should it be called a lure?). There are a couple of reasons for this. Firstly, it is ultra-buoyant, so a smaller hook bait can be used, which I am convinced leads to more bites. Secondly, it's flavourless, and this means that the fish cannot inspect it by using the smell/taste receptor in its olfactory glands located along the lateral line, its barbules and the olfactory cavities. The only way to test it is to mouth it, which is pretty much what we want them to do!

It seems that the fish in some waters prefer one colour initially. At Frimley the yellow scored well with those commons! After the fish had seen a bit of pressure on the zigs I found that it paid to experiment with the colour, especially if you observe fish swimming up and refusing the hook bait.

There is even scope for creating your own 'mix 'n' match' hook baits, changing shapes, using combinations of colours and even using dirty foam and nipping pieces out to give it a two-tone effect.



7 DISGUISE THE HOOK

It is vital to keep the bait and hook in very close proximity so that they always enter the mouth together. Over the last few years I have used hairs that are actually shorter than the width of my favourite nuggets of zig foam, so that baits can only be mounted by cutting a small slice in the foam into which the top half of the hook sits.

This not only helps to hide the hook but means that when the hook penetrates, the zig foam on the very short hair pops off the back of the shank and doesn't impair the hook taking a firm hold.

The rest of the hook can be further disguised by covering it with a trimmed-down hook sheath, which adds colour and makes hook baits look even more natural.

9 PICK 'EM OFF THE EDGES

If you find a group of fish milling about in an area, you know where to put your hook baits. However, a common occurrence is groups of fish travelling through an area, purposefully moving from one part of the lake to the next. They can be frustrating in their refusal to fall foul of the zigs.

In this scenario it pays to keep an eye out for smaller pods of fish on the periphery of the group. These are the ones that seem far more likely to take a hook bait that's in their path.

8 CHOOSE THE RIGHT LINK

What makes the perfect zig link material? Well, it needs to be clear, have low reflection, fine diameter for its breaking strain, excellent knot strength and a little stretch. The stretch is important as a buffer, helping small hooks to stay in and minimising the chance of the lead bouncing the hook out when the fish near the net. Coupled with the mighty size 12 Mugga, you find that inexplicable hook-pulls that sometimes happen soon after the bite are massively reduced.

Occasionally, it helps to use a light Mirage (pure fluorocarbon) link in ultra-clear water or at long range. Apart from near invisibility, the slightly stiffer fluorocarbon tends to resist tangles a little bit better on a big chuck. Always use a straight-eyed hook with fluorocarbon, and choose the ultra-reliable size 10 Incizor for this setup because knotless knots on hooks with aggressively inturned eyes are a major no-no.



There's more to hook-link choice than you think. Sometimes a fluorocarbon line (left) is best.

Tight lines are best for zigging.



10 TIGHTEN UP YOUR LINES

I find it particularly refreshing to use a method that allows the lines to be tightened fully to a lead, rather than being draped across the lake bed in an effort to avoid feeding fish coming into contact with them!

Tighten the lines up to the point that the lead becomes spring loaded should it become dislodged. This is because the fish often bolt towards you when they pick up the hook bait, in a similar way to chod rigs, due to the direction of pull from the lead.

If the lead pulls towards the rod tip the fish generally bolt off in the opposite direction. There are few things better than getting a stonking drop back only to look up and see a big oily flat spot swirling where your hook bait was!