



ANGLER FILE

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You don't need loads of terminal tackle with you for winter carping, but you do need the correct tackle, as Lewis Read explains.



# WINTER RIGS

With the onset of the cold weather, **LEWIS READ** reveals how to adapt your rigs to ensure that this winter is one to remember.

**O**kay, so you can stick with your standard approach throughout winter and you will get a few bites, but you could be catching so much more.

By making a few tweaks to your rigs and set-ups to suit the changes that winter brings, you will reap the rewards over the coming months as the water temperatures plummet.

The basic approach, and one that I adopt on most venues, is to scale down all my tackle items in winter. I use lighter hook-link materials, smaller hooks and leads and so on, for as fine a presentation as possible. This makes the terminal tackle less obtrusive, so the fish will pick the hook bait up with greater confidence. This extends all the way back to the rod, with shorter leadcore leaders and lighter main line too. I'll drop from my favourite, bombproof, 0.38mm Gardner HydroTuff main line to the 0.35mm version, which will still break at 17lb. Even this small drop in diameter gives your presentation more finesse and makes casting a little easier.

It's a basic fishing principle that the finer your end tackle, the more bites you get. However, how fine you can go and still safely land whatever you hook depends entirely on the size of fish that you're after, as well as the conditions in which you're fishing. Due to the lack of weed, algae and suchlike we're able to use finer tackle than we can throughout the warmer months.

Along with the 'scaling down' theory, the use of finer materials and smaller hooks, for me at least, is dictated by the use of smaller baits, both freebies and hook baits. Carp feed less at this time of year and offering them a small mouthful gives you a far better chance of a pick-up because they feed harder for a given quantity of food.

Now that we've established this, we need to settle on the best set-ups to use. Through various stages of the winter the carp will

A simple rig with a short hair produces the goods.



show up in different areas of a lake. On sunny mornings they might spend their time over shallow gravel humps, plateaux or snags that receive most of the sunlight. However, they may spend much of the winter localised over areas of silt in deeper water, where a lot of the carp's natural invertebrate food has migrated to as temperatures drop in the late autumn. These are larders that the fish are able to pinpoint and visit whenever they fancy a munch. The favoured areas will be different for each lake, so you need to spend time looking for the fish, or fishing different areas until you pinpoint where they are spending their time.

Carp can shoal up tightly when the water temperatures drop and remain in the areas where they feel most comfortable for most of the winter. Unless they come under intense fishing pressure in that area they won't move around nearly as much as they do in summer. That said, don't be so blinkered into always fishing the same swim because you've caught from there before because the fish will move, just less frequently and probably not as far as during the rest of the year.

### Total Tip

When using fluorocarbon or mono hook-link materials you must use a hook with a straight, or out-turned eye. An inturned eye will cause a pressure point on the hook link that could lead to breakages.



You then need to suit your terminal tackle and the presentation to the lake bed that you're fishing over. For instance, there's little point in casting a heavy inline lead and short hook link into

Scale down your terminal tackle for the colder months.



## HOW TO TIE A D RIG – THE ULTIMATE WINTER PRESENTATION



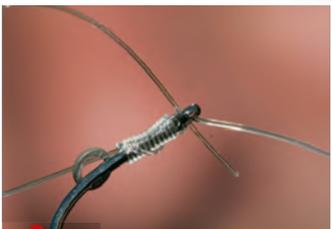
**STEP 1** You will need fluorocarbon, a rig ring and a hook with a straight eye.



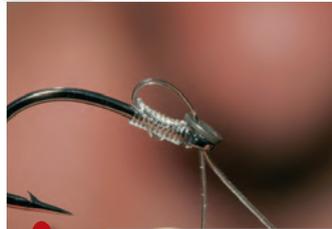
**STEP 2** Tie your hook to a length of fluorocarbon with a knotless knot (see page 178).



**STEP 3** Thread a small, circular rig ring onto the tag end, which usually forms the hair.



**STEP 4** Pass the tag through the back of the eye of the hook, towards the point.



**STEP 5** Pull the tag end through the eye to form a 'D' on the back of the shank.



**STEP 6** Trim the excess from the tag end and then blob it carefully using a lighter.



**STEP 7** The blob will prevent the tag end from pulling back through the eye.



**STEP 8** To attach your hook bait you will need a small, latex bait band.



**STEP 9** Pass the band through the rig ring and back through itself to secure it in place.



**STEP 10** Thread your chosen bait onto the bait band, as you would with a hair rig.



**STEP 11** Trap the bait in place by passing a hair stop through the bait band.



**STEP 12** Your D rig is ready for action. All you need to do now is balance the bait.

Once the temperatures plummet your aim should be to catch carp of any size, rather than sit it out on difficult waters for a lump.



three feet of silt, it'll bury out of sight and the carp won't find it.

My preference is to use a helicopter set-up for the majority of my fishing. This is very versatile and is ideal for soft lake beds because you can move the back stop up your leader, depending on how soft the lake bed is, ensuring that your hook link and hook bait aren't dragged into it.

If you are fishing an area of lake bed that is harder, then it's a simple case of moving the

stop on the leadcore closer to the lead. This minimises the movement in the pendant lead and increases the hooking efficiency. In winter, when the fish are moving slowly, small tweaks like this can mean the difference between a blank day and a bonus fish head-butting the spreader block.

I choose to use a covert lead-clip set-up with a short piece of sinking rig tubing where it offers me an advantage. Scenarios such as fishing over severe gravel bars when a long leadcore will be blatant because it is hard to get it to lie flush all the way down the nearside of a bar, or around weed where it may be essential to lose the lead, for example. The biggest advantage of this presentation, though, is when you're likely to be staying mobile. You can remove your lead when moving and quickly change it to suit each swim without having to retie your entire set-up.

A razor-sharp hook doesn't need to be attached to a big lump of lead for it to work, and the smaller the lead, the less disturbance it makes when you cast in. This suits the fined-down rigs and, make no bones about it, a stealthier approach will be beneficial all year round.

Running rigs are another popular lead arrangement for winter fishing, but I'm not a fan. I don't believe that they offer better bite indication than a helicopter or lead-clip arrangement, especially if they are coupled with a leadcore or fused-loop leader, and tend not to use them.

When fishing over silt during winter I'll often be using a single hook bait that's been glugged in the likes of Aminol and Minamino so that it leaches plenty of food signals into the water.

This will often be a dark bait too, as opposed to the popular hi-viz approach. Why? It's simply that diving birds will not be able to home in on a dull-coloured bait as quickly as they would on a bright bait in the clearer water. It is normally very detrimental to your chances if you have to recast more than necessary because birds keep picking at the hook bait. I have found that when fish have been shifted



A short hair, or D rig is perfectly suited to a carp's winter feeding habits.

out of an area by the disturbance of repetitive casting they are less likely to come back to you on that session, simply because they are much slower.

Should I be fishing over a firmer lake bed I'll use a balanced bottom bait, and I'd use a rig to suit, such as a D rig tied from fluorocarbon.

Gardner's Mirage fluorocarbon again allows for a more subtle presentation because the water clarity will be improved due to the cold weather. If you're not careful your rigs can stand out like a sore thumb over clean lake beds. I use fluorocarbon, and nylon, for the D rig and this is primarily for boilie hook baits.

When using very small, lightweight, 'bit' baits, it has become apparent, both through my fishing and the results of those around me, that the best hook-link material bar none is the most supple braid you can find. A stiff material limits the hook bait's movement, which has a more severe

effect with small baits than big baits because everything is relative. If you don't have any braid with you, strip all of the coating from a coated braid and use the inner. In fact, the inner braid from Gardner Chod Skin is the braid that I tend to use. It's really supple and smooth, and a nice colour to boot. The only problem is, of course, tangles, but using a nugget of dissolving rig foam, or a tiny PVA bag, helps to stop this happening.

I'll touch on balanced baits next month, but the reason for using them is because the rig settles on the bottom in a far more controlled manner and the hook bait will come to rest over the top of the hook, hiding it from view. Furthermore, carp feed slower in cold water due to a slower metabolism – another effect of the lower temperatures. A balanced presentation can be picked up with far less effort and a half-hearted suck in the direction of the bait will cause the hook bait to fly further back into the carp's mouth than a standard bait. This in itself is often enough to spook them into a sudden movement that will hook them.

Even if the carp are feeding very tentatively, with their mouths tight to the lake bed, a D rig will ensure that if the bait is picked up then the hook will make it far enough into the mouth to find a secure purchase because the hook and bait are close together. You get the same effect with a short hair because the hook and bait are again in close proximity, so it's worth

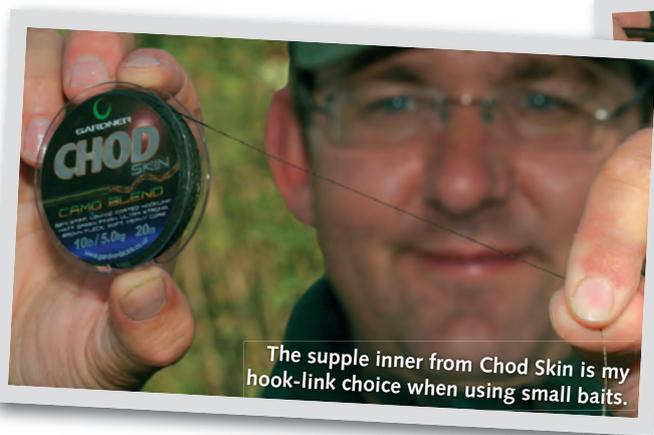
### Total Tip

With the improved water clarity that the cold weather brings, using fluorocarbon hook links, especially over clean lake beds, will ensure that your rigs are difficult for the carp to detect.



Using a lighter main line will aid presentation and casting.

giving them a try too. However, where a D rig scores over a knotless-knot presentation is that the D acts as a hinge, allowing the hook to flip and drop into position in the carp's mouth where it can find a secure hold, usually in the bottom lip or the scissors. If the hook takes hold in the bottom lip it will generally be a more secure hook-hold and will be less likely to slip. You want to turn every chance into a fish on the bank during winter, so a rig that gives a good hook-hold is vital.



The supple inner from Chod Skin is my hook-link choice when using small baits.



The beauty of a lead clip is the ability to change the size and shape of your lead quickly and easily.

You'll hear some anglers advocating short rigs and others long ones for winter fishing, which can be confusing. I go through phases with the length of my rigs and have found that certain lengths work better on particular venues. Experiment a little and once you've caught a few on a certain length of rig, stick with it. While on the subject of experimenting, if you want to have a play around with presentations then do it now, before

winter takes hold completely. Bites are at a premium through the coldest months, and the last thing you need is to suffer hook-pulls because you're experimenting. Find something that works and stick with it, because consistency with your rigs, baits and location is paramount for success throughout winter.



A small, balanced hook bait was the downfall of this pretty mirror – give them a go.

### NEXT MONTH

Lewis reveals which baits to use, why, and how to ensure success through the coldest of conditions. If you want to up your catch rate this winter do not miss this – December issue on sale November 27th, 2009