

Artificial Baits for Tench

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It amazes me when I hear anglers say that they would have no confidence in using fake baits, because fake baits have played a major role in my fishing for many years. Fishing for specimen tench requires strong tackle with 8lb to 10lb line commonly used, coupled with strong heavyweight hooks in size 10 upwards often being necessary to land fish without the hook pulling or opening out. Providing the bait acts reasonably naturally, tench have no problem in accepting maggots or casters on a size 10 hook. Being hair-rigged on a shortish sinking braid hooklink, the buoyancy fake baits provide is perfect for counterbalancing the weight of my heavy duty hooks and create a neutral buoyant presentation of the bait. While it is possible to use fake baits in combination with real baits on the hook, I seldom bother as the artificials are so effective on their own. Not only do they have the advantage of being largely immune from the attentions of small roach and rudd but eels will avoid them too most of the time, which is often a blessing

when fishing after dark. On the other hand, tench, carp and bream, along with all other cyprinid species have no problem with accepting fake baits, which are often visually easier to locate than the real things. In the past I used to make my own fake maggots out of rig foam and use them in combination with live maggots to counterbalance the hook, but once buoyant plastic baits became commercially available I used them in preference and I particularly like Drennan's buoyant baits because they look so realistic.



Over the years in my tench fishing I have worked hard to develop my approach to fishing maggots and casters because in most the waters I fish these baits outfish all others. Casters are my number one bait for tench because they absolutely love them. Real casters are difficult to use on the hook when legering as they are so delicate but hair-rigged fake casters completely overcome this problem. Where small fish are not a problem, I don't think you can beat fishing small PVA mesh balls of casters nicked onto the hook. After the PVA has dissolved it leaves an irresistible little pile of bait on the lakebed with the fake hookbait sitting in the middle of it just begging to be sucked up. And, because of the hookbait's neutral buoyancy, this ensures that it will shoot up into a fish's mouth as soon as it sucks at that little pile of casters. Of course it is possible to fish dead maggots in exactly the same way, though I personally find casters more effective.

Quite superb 10lb 9oz Gravel Pit Tench which was fooled by an artificial bait



Big tench and weed often go hand in hand and the best tench swims can be difficult to fish because of the weed. Swimfeeders are obviously very effective for tench and work well with maggots and casters as well as sweetcorn and pellets in open water, but swimfeeders are notoriously difficult to use in even a small amount of weed without getting hung up in it. Try casting a leger rig into light weed and compare it with what happens when you cast a swimfeeder to the same spot and you will see what I mean - while the feeder rig will tend to get stuck solid every time and come back draped with weed, more often than not the leger rig will come back clean as a whistle. I don't advocate fishing in weed that is so dense that we risk damaging fish trying to drag them out of it, but very often we cannot

avoid weed altogether without also avoiding the fish and therefore we need to have strategies to cope with it. And using PVA balls of bait certainly provides a useful strategy for getting the bait on the lakebed where you want it. Over the past few seasons my tench rigs have undergone

various changes to get the best out of them, with the short hooklink paternosters I used only a few years back now largely abandoned in favour of semi-fixed lead rigs and helicopter rigs. Lead-core leaders have become a standard means of sinking the line in the vicinity of the hook bait. More recently I have also taken to incorporating PVA clips into my rigs to keep the whole thing as neat, compact and weed-proof as possible. Semi-fixed and paternoster rigs must be constructed with the safety of the fish in mind, however, and it is impossible to over-emphasize the importance using fail-safe rigs so that in the event of losing a rig, the worst outcome will be a fish left carrying only a short hooklink rather than towing the entire rig around until it becomes tethered to snags.

