

A silhouette of a fisherman is shown on the left side of the image, holding a large, circular hoop net. The fisherman is positioned against a bright sunset over the ocean, with the sun low on the horizon. The net is held open, and its mesh is clearly visible. The background consists of a blue sky with some light clouds and the dark, rippling surface of the water.

Hoopin' It Up

**A Guide to
Lobster and Crab
Hoop Netting**

Jimmie Salazar

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2008 · J.S. GRIP

1. Hoop Net Gear and Rigging

As Michael Folkes from the TV show “Inside Sportfishing” said, “Hoop netting isn’t brain surgery.”

No, it’s not, although some nights it might feel like it is. But with just a few tips and tricks, you can increase your odds and enjoy an evening of catching lobsters and crabs. Hopefully this chapter will get you on your way to a delicious lobster dinner.

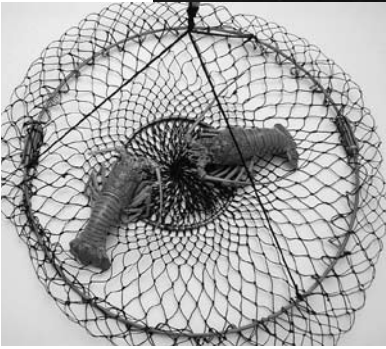
Classic and Conical Hoop Nets

The first thing you need is a hoop net. At the time of this writing there are two major manufacturing and importing companies that sell hoop nets in the Southern California area. Promar is by far the largest manufacturer of hoop nets and hooping accessories. Danielson is the other supplier of hoop nets, although only Promar’s nets are patented.

There are two types of hoop nets on the market at this time, shown on the following page. The first is the classic or “old school” style of net. Classic style nets sit flat on the bottom, and the bugs can crawl in and out easily.

The other style of net is a conical net. Both Promar and Danielson® manufacture this style of net. Both styles of nets are very efficient at catching lobsters and crabs, although, with a longer soak and a deeper pull, conical nets are about fifty percent more successful than traditional nets. Conical nets are easier to use and require very little technique. They work extremely well in deep water from sixty to one hundred feet and even deeper, if you are willing to pull up that much rope.

Lobsters are not the sharpest knives in the kitchen drawer, so once in the net they will usually stay in there until the bait has been completely eaten. If frightened or startled, they move into the relative safety of the “corner” of the net, but a few minutes later they come right back out and start eating again as if nothing ever happened. Once in a conical net, the



Classic style hoop nets are simple, but lie flat and allow lobsters to crawl in and out

The Promar Eclipse, a conical hoop net, comes up full of bugs



bugs usually stay there until you bring them up to the boat to measure their carapaces.

At the time of this writing, DFG does not have any more of a legal description of a hoop net than the following, from their 2007 regulations:

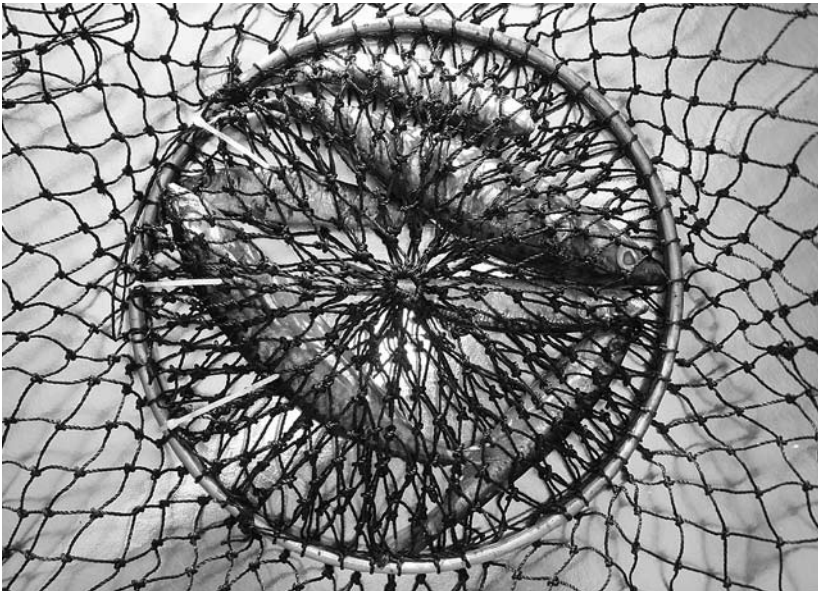
Baited hoop nets may be used to take Spiny Lobster and all species of Crabs...not more than five baited hoop nets may be fished by a person to take Spiny Lobster and Crab, not to exceed ten baited nets fished from any vessel.

Because of the simple wording of the regulations, many different homemade designs are used. The most common, especially in the San Diego area, is the old Portuguese style net. It is usually made from heavy steel rebar and looks very similar in style to the classic type of net, except that the netting is much deeper and does not have a lower bait pocket. The original Portuguese style net had a piece of "tuna cord" (old Dacron-type line) tied across the big hoop. The bait, usually a mackerel, was attached to the tuna cord in the middle of the hoop. With today's "well-trained" seals and the increased number of them, this old style of baiting nets has become nothing but a good way to feed these furry freeloaders.

Promar has developed an interesting device that is a variation of this old baiting method. It's called the Bait Suspender, and it works in the same way as the tuna cord. It has two long-line clips that attach to the big hoop diametrically opposite each other. A bait cage is suspended between the clips on two short pieces of monofilament with snap swivels. It works great to increase the catch of traditional style nets.

The following are the basic parts of the classic style hoop net that most people will find in their local tackle stores.

First, there are two hoops that the polyethylene netting is attached to. The larger hoop is either thirty-two or thirty-six inches in diameter and made of galvanized steel. It forms the top of the net. The smaller hoop, also of galvanized steel, forms the bottom of the net. The netting between these two hoops forms a sort of cone with the tip cut off. On Promar nets, the lower hoop has a bait pocket woven into the middle of the netting. The bait pocket is simply a smaller ten- to fourteen-inch-diameter galvanized hoop with a second layer of netting. This additional layer of netting



Mackerel and sardines in a bait pocket

has an opening that allows bait to be placed between the two layers of net; the opening is then resealed with wire or zip-ties to keep the bugs and crabs from pulling out a free meal and leaving with it.

Attached to the large upper hoop in three places is the bridle. The bridle usually consists of three pieces of good quality nylon cord (usually called parachute cord) about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick, attached in an evenly spaced pattern. The bridle keeps the net level as you drop or lower it. Newer Promar nets have a raised “bump” at the spots where the bridle should be set. If you are using an older net, be sure to check the positioning of the bridle lines to ensure that they are evenly spaced.

Attached to the bridle is the main line and the bridle float. The bridle float is a small egg-shaped PVC foam float about three inches by five inches. It is attached just above the point where the three bridle lines converge, and keeps the bridle lines out of the bait area of the net. Without it, the bridle lines would drop down around the bait area, and when the net was pulled up the bridle lines could dislodge the catch and flip it out of the net. If you re-rig your nets to replace the line or change its length, be sure to remember to replace the bridle float.

Attached to the bridle and the bridle float is the main line. Promar nets are pre-rigged with a main line 100 feet long. Most Danielson nets

are sold unrigged; you purchase only the hoops, netting, bridle, and bridle float.

Promar nets are sold with 100 feet of line because they are often used as a fish landing net when fishing on a pier. Some people also use them to hoop with on the same piers. Hoop nets are often found in the southern and eastern parts of the country, where they are primarily used on piers as fish landing nets.

At the end of the main line is the marker float. The marker float helps you locate your net after you have dropped it to the bottom. Promar nets come with a small PVC foam float about three and a half by six inches. This float is too small for most uses and can easily be pulled under water. I recommend replacing it as soon as possible.

The Promar Eclipse, a conical net, uses all the same major parts as the classic style net: bridle, bridle float, main line, and marker float. But the net construction and frame are of a very different design. The conical style net is a sort or reverse hoop net. It has the wide hoop and closed netting at the bottom and tapers up to the smaller hoop, which forms the open top. The large and small hoops are connected with metal rods to keep them a fixed distance apart, forming vertical walls that angle inward. The Eclipse has a ten-inch-diameter version of Promar's patented bait pocket in the middle of the lower thirty-six-inch hoop. Danielson's conical net is fixed and has a deeper weave of netting at the bottom of the net.



Promar Eclipse (left) and Danielson (right) conical hoop nets.

Lobster Thermidor

As served aboard the last voyage of the Titanic. Recipe by Chef Louis P. De Gouy, from Gourmet, May 1941.

- 2 live lobsters
- 4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter
- ¼ pound mushrooms, trimmed and thinly sliced
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons medium-dry sherry
- 1 cup heavy cream, scalded
- 2 large egg yolks

Place lobsters head first into an 8-quart pot of boiling water. Loosely cover the pot and cook the lobsters over moderately high heat for 9 minutes from the time they enter the water, then transfer with tongs to the sink to cool.

When the lobsters are cool enough to handle, halve them lengthwise with kitchen shears, beginning from the tail end, then remove the tail meat. Reserve the shells. Cut the meat into ¼-inch pieces. Discard any remaining lobster innards, then rinse and dry the shells.

Heat butter in a heavy 2-quart saucepan over moderate heat until the foam subsides, then add the mushrooms and cook, stirring, until the liquid given off by the mushrooms has evaporated and the mushrooms begin to brown, about 5 minutes.

Add lobster meat, paprika, salt, and pepper, and reduce heat to low. Cook, shaking the pan gently, for 1 minute.

Add 1 teaspoon sherry and ½ cup hot cream, and simmer for five minutes.

Whisk together the egg yolks and the remaining sherry in a small bowl. Slowly add the remaining hot cream, whisking constantly. Transfer the egg mixture to a small heavy saucepan. Cook over very low heat while whisking constantly until it is slightly thickened and registers 160° F on an instant-read thermometer.

Add this finished custard to the lobster mixture while stirring gently. Preheat broiler.

Arrange the lobster shells, cut sides up, in a shallow baking pan and spoon some of the meat and sauce into each shell. Broil 6 inches from the flame until the lobsters are golden brown, about 4 or 5 minutes. Serve the remaining sauce on the side.

Rock Crab Recipes

Our local rock crabs have meat that can best be described as flaky, sweet, and delicately flavored. Most of the meat is found in the claws, and some in the legs and shoulders. Like lobsters, crabs are best steamed to enjoy their true sweet flavor. I usually steam four to six whole live crabs (depending on size) in a large pot with some Cajun or bay seasoning for 10 to 15 minutes. If I have a lot of crabs to process, I pull the legs and claws off after they have cooled a little and put them in a colander to cool completely before vacuum packing them. I pull the spiny, pointed end section of the legs off, so that they don't puncture the bags. I also try to get as much of the shoulder meat out of the sockets where the legs meet the body.



Clockwise from upper left:
yellow rock crab,
spider/sheep crab,
red rock crab



Crab Cakes

- 2 large eggs
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup chopped red bell pepper
- ½ cup chopped celery
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 2 tablespoons minced parsley
- 2 tablespoons minced basil
- Approximately ½ to 1 pound of cleaned crab meat (depending on how good the crabbing is)
- 2 cups panko bread crumbs
- Peanut or sesame oil for frying

Lightly beat the eggs in a large mixing bowl. Using a rubber spatula, combine all the ingredients except the bread crumbs and mix well. Add the bread crumbs a little at a time, and mix well.

Shape the crab mixture into patties and place on a plate or cookie sheet. Cover with plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator for at least one-half hour.

Heat the oil and pan-fry the crab cakes 5 or 6 at a time until golden brown and heated through, turning once with a spatula to brown both sides. They cook pretty fast—it only takes about 3 to 5 minutes for both sides. Peanut and sesame oil cook hot, so watch the heat and be careful not to burn the cakes.

Drain on paper towels and serve with some lemons or limes and some “Dad’s Cocktail Sauce” (below) and some Thai chili-garlic sauce. A remoulade sauce (next page) is the “classic” sauce to serve with your crab cakes.

Dad’s Cocktail Sauce

- 2 parts catsup
- 1 part horseradish
- 1 part yellow mustard

Combine all ingredients and mix well.



About the Author

Jimmie Salazar has been a licensed DFG kayak guide for ten years. He now teaches kayak fishing and lobster hoop netting in addition to his day job as a key grip in the motion picture business for the last thirty-five years. Jim also works with Promar and AHI giving seminars about lobster and crab hooping as well as developing new and innovative hooping and fishing products.

Jim was born in Los Angeles and is a second-generation Californian. He started fishing and diving with his father, Jim Sr., along the Baja coast at an early age. Their many trips took them to Ensenada, San Felipe, and as far south as Gonzaga Bay.

To find out more information about Jim's kayak hooping and fishing guided trips visit his web site at www.sabaslayer.com.

