



Proper dive flag is vital equipment, and hookah gear comes with its own safety demands. At top, basic snorkeling gear.

TOOL TIME

Besides your indispensable net, tickle stick, gloves and lobster gauge, there is one item that you should take with you every time you jump in the water in search of lobster. On numerous occasions it has saved this author the embarrassment of having to tell stories of the ones that got away.

>LOBSTER MIND-MELD TIP #5:

The key tool is a releasable weighted hand float, which a diver can tuck in his suit or clip onto a mesh belt. There is nothing worse than finding a great spot and getting one or two bugs, and then not being able to relocate the spot again, once you've dropped your catch off at the boat. Be sure to include this inexpensive tool next time you head down to the Keys.

UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

Once you get acquainted with finding optimum spots, you will be forced to make decisions on which ledge down below might be more likely to hold a lobster. If you snorkel and free-dive, you'll tire over time, and you won't want to waste energy covering ground needlessly. To make the most of every dive, follow tip number 6.

>LOBSTER MIND-MELD TIP #6:

Just as you sweep your front door mat on occasion, lobsters typically excavate debris out and away from the front of their dens. When snorkeling, you might see a ring of bare sand on the bottom. Learning how to identify these "white spots" will take a bit of practice, but after awhile this bottom feature will jump out at you. These same ledges or holes may also have small schools of 1- to 2-inch yellow striped gobies congregating on or around the mouth of the entrance. These small, symbiotic bottom-dwellers are a reliable sign that either a lobster or a crab is deep within the hole. So, even when you don't see any antennae, and only see these tiny fish, try tickling the hole. Usually, you will have a nice lobster emerge.



Colorful goby may hint at a lobster nearby.

Check carapace length of each bug—or someone else will.



SPINY LOBSTER SEASON

The two day Spiny Lobster Sport Season runs the last consecutive Wednesday and Thursday of July—this year, July 29 and 30.

Regular season opens August 6 and runs until March 31.

Minimum size is larger than 3 inches carapace length. Regular season bag limit 6 per person. Sport Season limit is 12 per person, except in Biscayne National Park and Monroe County, where it's 6.

Saltwater license and crawfish permit required.

For local area closures and other regulations, visit myfwc.com or contact a regional office of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Dive and tackle shops generally have detailed regulations during the week leading up to Sport Season.



Caribbean spiny lobster, top, and Spanish lobster, bottom.