

Air-dry bags shouldn't be overloaded and should be hung high in a tree, away from rodent attention.



SHAUN HARRISON

BAIT QUEST

# BAIT MANAGEMENT

Bait management. Now here's a good one, and a subject which seems to leave many anglers rather bewildered, especially when they want to venture off on a week's holiday, be it in England or abroad. Questions such as: how long will freshly prepared particles keep, and, how long will fresh frozen baits last before they start to go off? These are two of the most common queries I receive.





Two days of sweating in a plastic bag and the bait has had it!

Out of habit more than anything else I have always travelled with fresh bait, be it fresh boilies (which I used to try to keep frozen for as long as possible), or fresh particle. I used to even prepare the particle as I needed it on the bank. These days I adopt alternate methods, but still manage to keep bait in tip-top condition for a week away.

So, starting off with the humble boilie, let's look at the methods I adopt to keep them as palatable as possible for the carp.

Fresh frozen boilies, if transported in the same plastic bags as they were purchased, won't last for much more than three or four days (dependent upon the weather) before they show signs of starting to deteriorate. The first obvious sign on most boilies is the appearance of a fine white powder on the outside of the bait which gives the appearance of the boilies having been sprinkled with flour. This is the natural sugars in the bait starting to break down, and although quite unsightly in appearance, the carp actually find this quite palatable. This first stage of breakdown doesn't particularly concern me although I do try to stop my baits reaching this point.

So, what options do we have?

Let me say from the start that plastic bags and fresh frozen boilies are one of the worst combinations you can have. I know everyone supplies bait in plastic bags but it really is the worst way of storing them once taken out of the freezer. Plastic prevents the baits from drying, so traps all the excess liquid in the bag.

Plastic also allows bait to sweat if left in the sun. This situation will really shorten the life of your bait.

The methods I have employed over the years have been:

1. **Keep the boilies frozen for as long as possible.**
2. **Air-dry the baits and rehydrate them as and when I require them.**
3. **Start the air-drying process from leaving home.**
4. **Take a mixture of fresh, frozen, and shelf life baits.**

### Keep The Boilies Frozen For As Long As Possible

This is the method I always used to use. I have tried all sorts of methods over the years to try to keep the baits frozen for as long as possible, including cool bags, cool boxes, mini plug-in freezers, and the humble polystyrene box.

The big drawback to all these methods is the amount of room they take for relatively small amounts of bait. I have yet to find a cool bag that will keep baits frozen for more than a day or so.

Cool boxes vary enormously in price but I can assure you the expensive models generally work much more effectively than the cheap, almost disposable types. It all boils down to what they have been lined with and how good a seal they have. One thing which is the kiss of death to your bait is to be opening and closing the box and handling the frozen product inside

whilst looking for one particular bait. The heat from your hands will quickly start to thaw your bait. You are far better carrying several smaller containers and keeping them sealed until you actually require the contents, than one big container which you have to keep breaking into. Handle the bait as little as possible and it will last much longer. I even used to take it a stage further and freeze the actual cool box with the lid off once loaded. This helps to refreeze anything which has started to thaw whilst being handled during packing.

The method I eventually arrived at for maximum freezing time was to individually wrap each day's worth of bait in silver foil then pack it tightly into the cool box leaving no space around the bait. If there was excess space I would pack this with polystyrene, cardboard, or even paper, then drop the whole lot back into the freezer for a couple of days to get everything back as cold as possible. I must say that polystyrene boxes take a lot of beating for keeping bait fresh, particularly if you go to the trouble of wrapping this in foil too. This helps reflect the heat back off itself, although it doesn't stand a lot of knocking around. Silver tape is tougher.

Kept like this, and loaded into the car first so that it receives minimum heat through the windows, etc. your baits will remain icy cold for a few days. As I said, don't break the seal until you really have to. You are much better off with five separate containers than one.

The rest is common sense really. Whilst actually fishing store the baits in the coolest place you can find. Inside the car gets very hot, especially through clear windows. Under the car is often a good place, or in the shade of large trees, etc. But, remember to move the boxes as the sun moves round.

It may all sound like a lot of messing around, but treat your bait as you would your food. You don't want it going off!

Shaun prepacks a day's bait in tinfoil before freezing it.



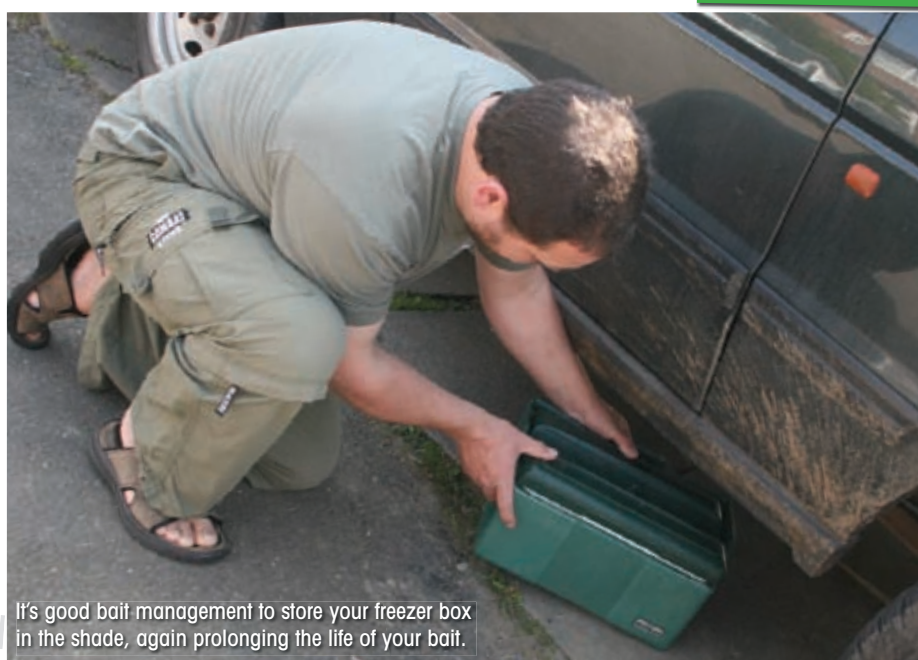
I know everyone supplies bait in plastic bags but it really is the worst way of storing them once taken out of the freezer



## SHAUN HARRISON BAIT QUEST



Keeping a freezer box in a large freezer will aid your bait management.



It's good bait management to store your freezer box in the shade, again prolonging the life of your bait.

### Air-Dry The Baits And Rehydrate Them When I Require Them

This is a subject quite close to my heart and a subject which will take a full article in its own right to cover in full. I have written about it before in this and other magazines and it is a subject I still get asked about an awful lot. I guess I should update it and write an up-to-date piece on rehydration for this Bait Quest series. For now, though, I am going to have to just skim the subject.

It is the method I have used most and I must admit for several years it was the only way I would consider using boilies. Since starting Quest Baits, however, I have come to believe that I really should be catching on the baits I am offering straight out of the bag. The same baits that anyone can get

their hands on.

So, what is this air-drying and rehydration business?

Basically, I dry the baits over a long period of time so there is absolutely no moisture left in them whatsoever. Baits dried in this way will last for years. When I require the baits I add liquid the day before so that the dried-out baits soak the liquid back into them and revert back to a normal boilie.

Originally I used simple lake water to do this. Approximately one part water to two parts bait reverts them back to conventional-looking baits, but you can get more liquid in if you want a softer bait. I later found that by using different liquids, some really interesting and very different types of bait could be produced. As I said, I won't go

into too much detail now as I will probably revisit the whole air-drying/rehydration theme in a later issue.

To dry off the baits I used to pick the warmer days of summer and simply leave them on a large bath towel outside in full sunlight, then as the sun started to fall in the sky I would bring them indoors and into the spare room where I would have a heater running.

These days I am a little spoiled with a proper walk-in drying room for my baits, complete with dehumidifiers and air-conditioning. I dry enough in one go to last me several months. The big advantage to travelling with these is that you are able to carry more bait because they shrink in size and subsequently weigh less.

Once dried I favour cardboard boxes to keep these baits in. Cardboard is infinitely superior to plastic.

### Start The Air-Drying Process From Leaving Home

This is a method I learned from Bernard Sissons. I had a session with him at Remy, close to the mighty Orient in France. I have known Bernard for years but for some reason had never travelled abroad with him. It was during the build-up to this session that he explained his preferred method of bait management.

Quite simply he keeps his bait frozen right through until the last minute before he gets into his car to start the journey. Only then does he remove them from the freezer, transfer them into air-drying bags and simply start the air-drying process on his journey to the venue.

I have tried the method for myself a couple of times now and have found it works quite well, as long as you have a pretty dry weather forecast.

Once you arrive at the venue, hang up the



Air-dry your fresh bait on a towel or large table, and make sure you spread them out evenly.





A cardboard box is good for storage as the box will draw off moisture as the bait dries out.

bait in trees during the daytime and cover them in the evenings to prevent the night-time damp undoing your drying work. As is always the case with mesh air-drying bags, you need to shuffle the baits around several times a day to ensure all the baits dry evenly.

## A bag of bait suspended from a clothes line puts off all but the most persistent of rodents

If you experience damp weather then it is a case of having to leave baits hanging in the car.

Alternatively, a plastic bucket (with a secure fastening lid) containing salt and/or rice to pour the baits into will also help to keep the moisture out.

I find that by carrying a short piece of clothes line on which to hang the air-dry bags, I am much less likely to suffer rodent problems from them climbing trees and nibbling the bags. A bag of bait suspended from a clothes line puts off all but the most persistent.

This method gives you fresh bait with which to start the week, and gradually the bait dries through the week but is not so hard that it becomes unusable.

A simple method that requires hardly any pre-arranging, and, for a week's fishing you should be able to prevent your bait beginning to powder.

## Take A Mixture Of Fresh Frozen And Shelf Life Baits

In my own fishing, this is something I find myself doing more and more. In the past I have been somewhat against shelf life baits. This was because in my opinion the early shelf life baits weren't a patch on the early frozen baits. I would certainly not have liked some of the early preservatives to be used in my baits, but things have now moved on a long way.

I can't vouch for every company out there,

but as far as Quest Baits is concerned I know everything that goes into the shelf life and have absolutely no problem at all in using them. The only difference between our fresh and shelf life baits is the type of egg used and the drying process. I have started to mix and match shelf life baits and fresh frozen baits for my normal fishing and actually use shelf life baits almost all the time for hookbaits, as these tend to be a little tougher than the fresh frozen versions.

By starting a week's session with fresh frozen and shelf life baits you will have the best of both worlds. If you do encounter problems storing fresh frozen baits because of horrendous rain, you will definitely have

good bait by the end of the week, in the shape of the shelf life baits. Even if the fresh frozen baits start to turn by, let's say the Wednesday, then you still have perfectly fresh bait available.

Now that I have finally started to use shelf life baits more in my own fishing, I have become so much more confident in them. It was a mental block which I needed to get through after years of relying on fresh bait. Unfortunately, due to some of the baits which were available in the past, a lot of French venues don't allow shelf life baits to be used on their waters. If they are allowed, then these are definitely the easiest way to travel – just open the bag and use them.



Both salt and rice are good for drawing off moisture from bait.

Get the bait right, keep it fresh, and every carp on the planet will want to eat it! The business end of a 30lb+ English common.





# SHAUN HARRISON BAIT QUEST



Shelf life boilies left out in the sun in their plastic bag, will trap moisture, which leads to the bait going off very quickly.

Mix and match frozen and shelf life baits for added attraction.



Even shelf life baits can take a little looking after. Because our baits aren't full of preservatives, a bag left out in the sun can sweat then start the breaking-down process of the bait. Look after shelf life baits in much the same way as you would your own food. Keep them as cool as you can out of direct sunlight – unless, of course, you are storing them in air-dry bags. If you are, then leave them in the sun during the day and cover them up at night. Dampness on shelf life baits can kill the shelf life properties. Similarly, never freeze a shelf life bait. Again, this will probably mess up the shelf life properties.

Well, there we have a brief skim through the subject of looking after boilies. Now, how about particle baits?

## Cooked Particles

Some particles work better as they start to 'turn'; some appear to work best fresh; some, such as tiger nuts, never seem to go off!

I have always liked hempseed. I have used more hempseed over the years than any other particle. Some swear by leaving it a few days before using it, but I have always preferred it fresh. At one time I would travel with enough freshly cooked hempseed to last me the first couple of days, then after that I would cook it on the bank as and when I needed it. This is fine, but I would find myself spending most of the week preparing bait! It wasn't until I discovered that hempseed appears to release so much more flavour once it has been frozen that it started me thinking about taking it away frozen. Now I don't know why it is, but for some reason cooked hempseed seems to take a long time to thaw out. I found this out, much to my annoyance, the first time I took frozen hemp with me for what was then my usual session of a day with a night stuck on either side. I had trouble thawing it out to use!



Particles can be frozen for transit and freshness.





Good bait management  
means fresh bait...  
means another take!

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**BAIT QUEST**

Conan, the big old Mangrove warrior has slipped up on my rehydrated baits several times.

Now this suddenly got me thinking. Carp love frozen hempseed – fact. If I were to freeze it in large buckets then it wouldn't be thawing properly until halfway through a week. So now I travel with a bucket of freshly cooked hemp for the first day or so, a medium-sized bucket of frozen for the next couple of days, and a large bucket for the end of the week. The large bucket can take several days before it starts to thaw properly, ensuring fresh hemp for the duration of my stay. Now I no longer need to spend all my time cooking hemp. I simply travel with it in different-sized buckets so one batch thaws more quickly than the next batch.

This freezing of particles can be used for any of the particles. The only one I wouldn't bother with (although I rarely use them, to be fair) is tiger nuts. These will form a gooey syrup-type



Different-sized buckets of frozen baits will thaw out at different times, allowing you to plan ahead.



You might have the location right, but did you get your bait management right?



substance after a while but the tigers will still be fine. If it bothers you, simply wash them off and replace the liquid with fresh lake water. Certainly, for a week's fishing you don't need to worry about tigers going off.

Some of the combination seed mixes really come into their own once they have been left to stand for a few days. So, knowing your bait, and a little experimentation, will tell you whether or not to bother freezing any before you go.

Particles can be preserved in a MPG solution but I choose not to do this, preferring to keep everything as natural as possible. Many companies now offer particles with long shelf life dates in cans and jars. These are a very useful aid if you aren't quite sure about freezing baits, or, indeed, if you don't have spare freezer space.

### Tools Required

A top-opening chest freezer is very much an essential part of my own angling. I actually had a freezer installed in my bedroom when I was a

A cup of frozen water kept in the freezer will tell you that all is working fine. Check it regularly to see if your freezer is working properly.



kid and still lived with my parents, so I have never suffered moans about keeping that smelly bait away from the food.

Similarly, if I need to drop a less than clinically clean bucket in the freezer, then no one is going to get upset. I prefer top-opening freezers as they don't lose as much of the cold whilst rummaging about for

bait, and I found I could never seem to fit in any buckets or cool boxes in door-opening freezers.

One little tip, if you aren't using the freezer every day leave a cup of frozen water lying on its side in the freezer. If the freezer packs up for any amount of time then the water will thaw and run out of the cup. I once had a nagging doubt that one of my freezers had once been switched off for a period; by using the cup method you will know for sure. I feel this is a good idea with your own food freezer too – some foods shouldn't be used if thawed more than once.

**I find most of the air-dry bags supplied to the angler are a little too big. I prefer lots of smaller bags because the baits dry out easier in these**

Air-dry bags are another must for me. I find most of the air-dry bags supplied to the angler are a little too big. I prefer lots of smaller bags because the baits dry out easier in these. If you have 10 kilos hanging in a large bag, then the chances are that some of the bait, particularly that in the middle, isn't going to be dried as much as the stuff on the outside, despite you thinking you have shuffled the baits around enough. If just one bait starts to turn, then the rest will soon follow.

So, my only advice here is to look for the smaller bags and keep the bait in them to a minimum. Never overfill a bag because you won't be able to shuffle the baits around enough to ensure even drying.

Well, there you have it. My preferred methods for keeping bait fresh on long sessions. If you have freezers available at the venue then there is no problem. If, however, there are no facilities, then you now have a few different methods to consider.

Until next month, as always, I will sign off wishing you all very best fishes.



One for the cameras.