



Red Brook Harbor Yacht Club

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The Keys to Successful Anchoring

A key component to successful cruising is successful anchoring. Cruising can be very expensive if you only feel secure at night in a marina or on a mooring ball. But if you know how and where to anchor, a vast variety of beautiful locations will open up to you.

Successful anchoring begins with the right ground tackle. Anchor design has come a long way in the past two decades and if your boat has an older design, such as a Bruce or CQR, you may want to think of getting a new one. The new designs, such as a Rocna, Spade or Manson Supreme, not only hold better but more importantly when the wind or current switches they are far more likely to reset. (My wife and I have a Spade 25k on our 44 foot full keel cruiser. We've anchored more than 1,000 times and not once have we ever dragged, even when gusts have topped 60 knots.) The last thing you want is to find yourself dragging at two o'clock in the morning with the wind raging and rain pelting down. New anchors can be expensive, sometimes costing \$1,000 or more, but they're pretty cheap insurance considering the cost of your boat and possibly even your life. You'll also need to know what size anchor to get. The website of anchor manufacturers usually have a chart showing suggested anchor size for a given boat size. And it's usually better to have an anchor that's slightly too big than too small.

Next you'll need to decide on whether to attach your anchor to chain or rope or a combination of the two. If you look at experienced cruising boats, especially 35 feet and up, they usually have all chain. Chain is stronger than rope and will not chafe through. You will definitely want at least some chain, perhaps the first 30 feet or so, because rope sitting on the bottom can easily chafe through on a rock or some other hard object.

You will also need a windlass to bring your anchor up from the bottom. Some people pull it up by hand, but this is a pain and can be nearly impossible on bigger boats. Assuming your boat already has a windlass you'll need to get the right size chain to fit in the windlass.

There are several types and sizes of chain. BBB chain is generally the cheapest, but is not as strong. I suggest getting G4, which is more expensive but stronger and lighter. But be careful, BBB and G4 chain have different sized links and you'll need to make sure your windlass can handle that type of chain. The most common chain sizes are 1/4", 5/16" and 3/8". Unless you have an unusually big or small boat you'll probably need 5/16" chain.

Assuming you chose chain you'll also need a snubber. A snubber is a piece of line that attaches from your boat to the chain. This accomplishes a number of objectives. 1) most importantly, it serves as a shock absorber. In rough or windy conditions your boat will yaw and pitch and this motion can pull the anchor out of the sea floor since the chain has very little elasticity. The elasticity of 20 feet of rope (3/8" or 1/2" whichever matches the strength of your chain) will serve as a shock absorber. 2) the snubber will take strain off the windlass, helping it to last longer and ensuring that if the windlass were to break your chain would not run out without you knowing. 3) and finally, the snubber reduces noise traveling up the chain and into your boat.

You will also need a way to attach the snubber to the chain. Some people simply tie the snubber to the chain with a rolling hitch, but this can slip. You could also buy a hook designed for this purpose. Or you could do what we do and use a dyneema soft shackle to attach the chain to an eye loop at the end of the snubber. Be sure not to attach the snubber to your boat with an eye loop. We did this and one time a boat dragged on us and the strain was so great we couldn't get the eye loop off our cleat, so we had to cut the snubber. Better to end it with out a loop and simply tie it to a bow cleat.

Now that you've got your ground tackle sorted out, you'll need to decide on where to anchor. Many charting apps, such as Navionics include an application called Active Captain. This shows various suggested anchorages along your route and gives reviews from people who have used the anchorage before. You'll see in the reviews what conditions various anchorages are good for. Some are protected from all directions, others are exposed in some wind and wave conditions. You'll need to keep a close eye on weather forecasts to make sure you don't pick an anchorage that is not good for the weather conditions you'll be experiencing. Another thing to think about is whether the anchorage will be rolly, and the reviews will often give you a sense of this as well. It can be truly miserable being at anchor in a spot with big swell rolling through all night. You won't get any sleep. Some boats are better with swell than others. A wide catamaran will not roll as badly as a narrow trawler.

Now you'll need to decide how much chain or rope to put out. Generally, you should put out five feet of rode for every foot of water under your boat. So if you are in 10 feet of water you should have at least 50 feet of rode out. There is one small hitch to this. It's not actually how much water is under your boat but how many feet from your bow sprit to the bottom. So if your bow sprit is five feet off the water (as ours is) you'll need to add an extra five feet, which means that (10 ft +

5 ft) x 5 = 75ft of rode out in 10 feet of water. How do you know you have 75 feet of rode out? You'll need some way to mark your chain. Some boats have an automatic rode counter, but most do not. We put a wire tie on the chain at each 25 foot interval. We also use a different color for each interval (red 25, white 50, blue 75, yellow 100, and then start over again.)

Finally, you may find you're not alone in the anchorage. How do you know when you're too close. This is what we do when there is not a lot of room in an anchorage 1) observe what direction all the other boats are facing, which is determined by wind or current, whichever is stronger. 2) then we slow our speed to about three knots and inch towards another boat in the anchorage. We try to get 20 feet behind that boat and 20 feet to one side or the other. Then we drop the anchor and drift back until we've got the right amount of rode out. If you think you may be too close it's polite to ask the other boat owner what they think. You might also ask them how much rode they have out and try to match that, as long as you don't think they have too little out. Once you've got the required amount out, slowly back up and see if the anchor holds. If it holds increase your rpms to about 1500 or 2000 and hold it there for a couple of minutes. If you don't move, you can be confident your anchor will hold in almost any conditions.

If the anchorage is really tight, and you have a good modern anchor you then can pull in some rode until you're at 3 to 1. If the anchorage has plenty of space and the wind is predicted to blow you might want to put out 7 to 1 for extra security. If you're just staying for lunch and someone competent is going to be on the boat the whole time, you don't have to be so fastidious.

This may seem like a lot to think about, but one night at 2 a.m. the wind is going to start to howl and you're going to be very glad you did everything right.

Just one more thing, not everyone knows how to anchor. If you think someone has come in after you and anchored too close, its perfectly acceptable for you to

politely say you think they've anchored too close to you. If they refuse to move, marine law states that if you've asked them to move and they refused then if they damage your boat they are liable for the damage. That said, rather than risk getting hit and fighting to get compensated, we usually just move and find some place else to anchor. This doesn't happen very often, but we have done it a few times.

One last thing, I promise. You might find that some moron has not anchored properly and now the wind has picked up and they're dragging towards you. Rather than putting out a lot of fenders and trying to protect your boat, we find it's best to pull anchor and move out of their way. Sometimes this is not possible because they are already too close. So what we've done is attach 20 feet of floating line to the end of our anchor chain. This way we can let out all of our anchor chain and the floating line and motor away. When all is clear we find the floating line and pull up our anchor. It also helps to mark the place you dropped the line on your chart plotter so you can find it more easily later.

That's it. And remember, practice makes perfect.

Submitted by:

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