

Rafting

Rafting can be a lot of fun and safe when done properly. It takes some common sense and occasionally a bit of extra boat handling skill. But the rewards are worthwhile.

By Mike Huston

Rafting is basically mooring one or more boats to each other. I can think of three scenarios where rafting is common, although I suspect there are more. The first, and probably the most widespread, happens in harbors when they run out of slips or dock space and ask boats to tie up two or three deep. In many harbors this type of rafting is required.

The second reason to raft is to socialize while at anchor. We do this frequently with friends or during our classes when we have two or more boats traveling together. What could be better than spending a summer evening with friends?

The third usage of rafting has to do with helping a disabled boat get to a dock. In open waters towing is the best way to aid a powerless boat. But towing works poorly in tight spaces like

a marina. This is where rafting comes into play – it provides the control needed to guide a disabled boat safely up to a dock.

Setting up a boat to raft is very similar to the setup for a docking.



Two boats rafted with bow anchor and stern tie in Desolation Sound.

Put out four dock lines in the usual positions, a bow line, a stern line and two spring lines. As with docking, three or four fenders will be needed.

Placement of the fenders is where things deviate from a normal docking setup. You will need to determine where the two boats will meet. It is important to visualize both the fore and aft direction as well as up and down. On sailboats this usually means the fenders will need to be up at the toe rail, which is usually the widest point.

Power boats are more varied in design so you will need to visually decide where the points of contact will be and place fenders to protect them.

When the fenders, lines and crews are ready approach the other boat like you would a dock. Some timing may be required if the other boat is swinging on an anchor. When this happens I personally find it best to have the other boat moving toward me. If they are swinging away I end up chasing them and often miss. With them swinging toward me I can leave some extra room as I pull up and let them come to me.

Before the lines are tied there are a couple things to consider. First, if the two boats are both sailboats, be sure the masts are not lined up. This prevents a large wake from rocking the masts into each other – no one needs a broken spreader. Second, think about how you are going to get from one boat to another and position the gate(s) accordingly.

Once the boats are in position, tie the lines similarly to being at a dock (a bow line, a stern line and two spring lines). If needed, it is okay on a sailboat to tie to chain plates as they are as strong as a cleat. It is not a good idea to use lifeline stanchions.

Each of the three scenarios for rafting has its own nuances, the ones I can think of are:

Flotilla rafted four abreast in Desolation Sound.

Rafting at a Dock

- If there are multiple boats to choose from, look for one of about the same size and freeboard. This makes tying easier and reduces the chance of damage should a big wake come your way.
- If you need to raft to a smaller boat and there is an option, put the larger boat on the dock and the smaller one outside. If the smaller boat cannot be moved it may be helpful to take the bow and/or stern line from the larger boat past the smaller boat and tie them directly to the dock.
- If you are rafted to someone you do not know and need to cross their boat, it is generally considered polite to cross in front of their mast instead of through the cockpit.
- When practical, ask permission to raft (even if required) and talk over issues of mutual interest. For example, find out which boat needs to leave first in the morning and put them on the outside.

Rafting When Anchored

- If the conditions are calm and the anchorage is protected, it is acceptable to raft more than one boat on a single anchor. Generally, it is a good idea to have the boat with the largest anchor put theirs down.
- If more than one anchor is used, be sure to put out a stern anchor or stern tie to shore. This will prevent the anchor lines from tangling when wind or current rotates the raft.
- If the wind does come up unexpectedly during the night and

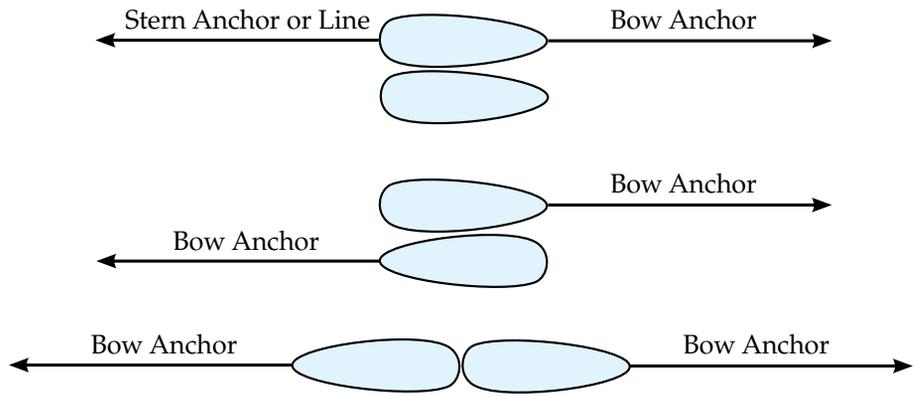


Figure 1

it is practical to do so, each boat should break off and set her own anchor, or possibly run an extra anchor out using a dinghy. If the wind is strong enough to require extra holding power it is unlikely to shift. Therefore, tangling of the rodes is less of a concern.

- Figure 1 shows some creative ways to raft in a small space where swing room is tight. We have used all of these at one time or another. The stern-to-stern tie works very well when both boats have swim steps. Passage from boat to boat is easy and safe. During the night the boats can be separated by lengthening the lines holding them together and, if needed, shortening one of the anchor lines.

Rafting While Aiding a Disabled Boat

- First, let me say the subject of aiding a disabled boat is worthy of its own article and I am just touching on it here. Hopefully these two ideas will facilitate the process if you find yourself in a place to help.

- Once you have towed a boat to the harbor raft to them in a 'hip tie' position. This means your bow will be tied to their aft quarter. The idea is to get the boats linked together with your rudder behind the stern of the boat being towed. This will greatly increase maneuverability. It may also allow you to push them into a slip.
- Be sure and have the aft and forward spring lines tied tight as both will be needed to apply forward and reverse thrust. Any slack in these lines will cause things to jerk when changing directions.

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Mike Huston teaches sailing for San Juan Sailing in Bellingham, WA. He has been sailing for over 40 years, racing and cruising. He and his wife own a Jeanneau 43DS, "Illuminé."

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