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Boating Tip #39: Reefing

Reefing is a procedure used to reduce the amount of sail area exposed to the wind in order to diminish the amount of heel and keep the boat moving forward. Various reefing systems are installed to assist with reducing sail area on modern recreational sailboats. Once sail area is reduced, and a new foot of the sail is created, the sail is secured to the boom with small lines called reef points. There may be one, two, three or more sets of reef bands sewn into the sail, allowing the sail to be further reduced in size as winds increase in velocity and weather conditions deteriorate.

Reefing a mainsail

- Go on to a beam or broad reach
- Release the main sheet and let the main luff
- Let out the boom vang
- Drop the main to the desired reef points using the main halyard
- Attach the cringle near the luff of the sail to the hook on the windward side
- Adjust reef line to create outhaul tension
- Secure main using the reef points with reef knots so the sail doesn't flap
- Hoist main halyard to trim and create a new foot of the mainsail

Reduce genoa sail area

- Turn into the wind
- Partially roller furl the sail
- Move the fairleads forward