

Beginners Fishing Guide



AGFC

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

There's nothing better than a lazy afternoon on the bank of your favorite fishing hole, dreaming about a lunker that's about to make your bobber disappear.

If you're already a fisherman, then you know the thrill of anticipation. If you're not an angler, this publication will help you get started.

Now that we've piqued your interest, you may realize that you've got a few things to learn about fish and angling. No problem – the basic fishing techniques described in this guide don't require a huge tackle box. A rod, reel, hook, bobber and a few worms will work just fine.

After you land your trophies, we'll help you identify them and show you how to prepare and cook your catch of the day.

You've made it this far – let's get moving. Take a gander at the guide and head out to enjoy the best of what Arkansas water has to offer.

Sincerely,



Scott Henderson, Director
Arkansas Game and Fish Commission



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Department of the Interior
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Little Rock, Arkansas 72205

Beginners Fishing Guide

Arkansas Game and
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Keeping the Natural State natural.

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If you cannot find the answer to your fishing question,
please call (877) 676-6963.

HABITAT

“Where Fish Live”



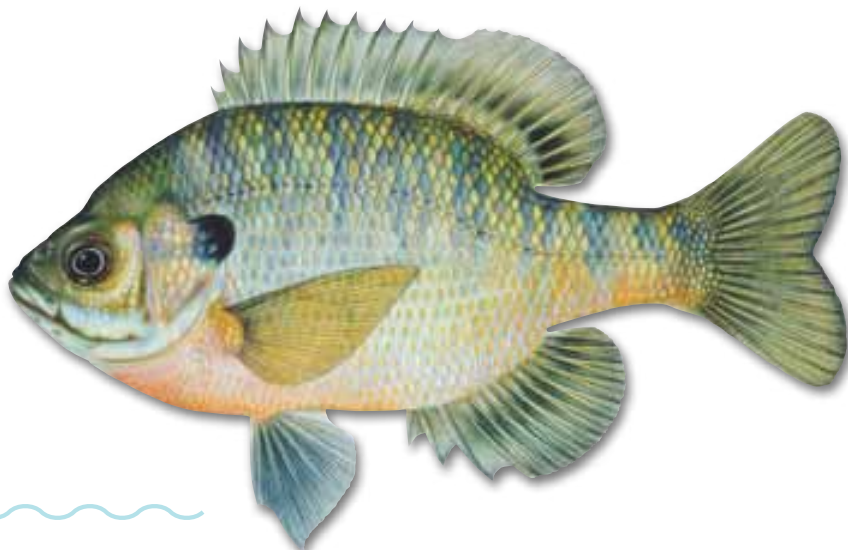
Healthy fish need water, food, cover and space. These four things are called “habitat.” It’s important that people take good care of lakes and streams so fish and other life in the water will have what they need to stay healthy.

Bream

Fishing Fun for Everyone

Mention bream in Arkansas and you're talking about the sunfish family. Bream are numerous and very easy to catch. They will bite just about anything – earthworms, corn, jigs, you name it. They can be found in just about any stream, lake or pond and are great to eat.

Arkansas has one of the largest state-owned systems of fish hatcheries in the United States.



Bluegill

Nicknames: Sun perch, copperbelly

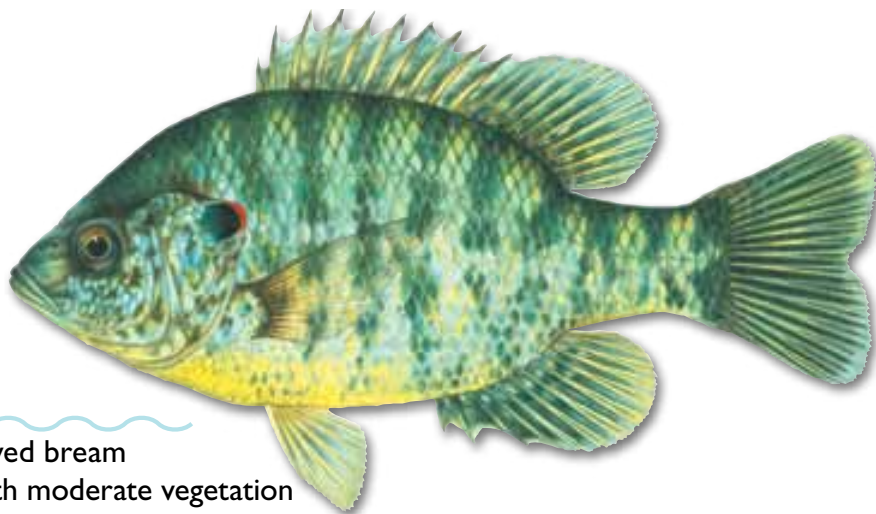
Habitat: Found in relatively clear, slow-moving streams, ponds and lakes

Preferred Water Temperature: 75-80 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 67-70 degrees; April-August

Natural/Live Bait: Crickets, aquatic insects, earthworms, maggots and catalpa worms

Artificial Lures: Jigs, small spinners, plastic/hair grubs, popping bugs and insect imitations



Redear Sunfish

Nicknames: Shellcracker, government-improved bream

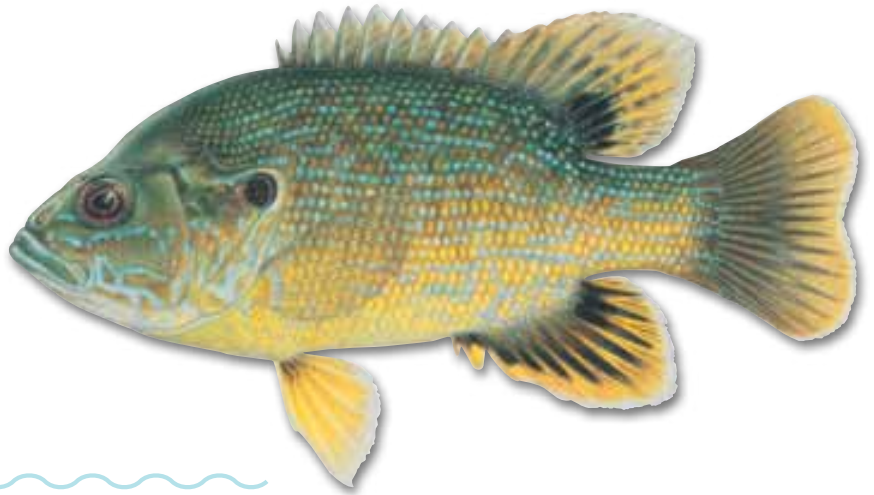
Habitat: The bottom of clear, quiet waters with moderate vegetation

Preferred Water Temperature: 73-77 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 66-70 degrees; April to mid-August

Natural/Live Bait: Earthworms, crickets, grubs, maggots, catalpa worms and freshwater grass shrimp

Artificial Lures: Redears rarely take artificials



Green Sunfish

Nicknames: Ricefield slick, greenie, perch

Habitat: Ponds, lakes and slow-moving streams and ditches.

Found in thick, weedy cover and can tolerate murky, warm water.

Preferred Water Temperature: 80-84 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 69-73 degrees; April-August

Natural/Live Bait: Aquatic insects, crayfish, earthworms, crickets, catalpa worms and maggots

Artificial Lures: Small spinners, jigs, plastic/hair grubs, popping bugs and insect imitations



Longear Sunfish

Nicknames Big-eared sunfish, sun perch

Habitat: Found in clear, rocky bottom, upland streams, oxbows, lowland lakes and lowland streams

Preferred Water Temperature: 68-70 degrees

Spawning Temperature: 70-80 degrees

Natural/Live Bait: Aquatic insects can be more than 80 percent of the longear's diet

Artificial Lures: Small spinners, jigs, plastic/hair grubs, popping bugs and insect imitations



Rock Bass: Rock, Shadow and Ozark

Nicknames: Goggle-eye, redeye

Habitat: Found in clear, weedy, fast-moving streams with rocky bottoms

Preferred Water Temperature: 69-70 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 60-70 degrees; April-May

Natural/Live Bait: Crayfish, crayfish tails, aquatic insects, small fish, earthworms, crickets and maggots

Artificial Lures: Popping bugs, jigs, small spinners and plastic worms/grubs



Warmouth

Nicknames: Stumpknocker, goggle-eyed perch

Habitat: Shallow lakes, ponds, sloughs and slow-moving streams with muddy bottoms, lots of weeds, stumps and logs

Preferred Water Temperature: 80-85 degrees

Spawning Temperature and Time: 65-70 degrees; April to mid-August

Natural/Live Bait: Earthworms, insects, maggots, grubs, catalpa worms, small fish and crickets

Artificial Lures: Popping bugs, jigs, small spinners and grubs

Bream Habitat



Fishing for Words

Use the words in the box to complete the following sentences.

1. All anglers should know their state's fishing _____ and regulations.
2. Never cast when someone is _____ behind you.
3. _____ can be used to catch all types of bream.
4. _____ rarely take artificials, unlike bluegills.
5. More than 80 percent of the _____'s diet is aquatic insects.

CRICKETS
LONGEAR
RULES
REDEARS
STANDING

Natural/Live Bait



crayfish



crickets and grasshoppers



insect larvae



earthworms



grass shrimp

Artificial Lures

Lead-headed jigs and jig bodies (feathers, natural hair or plastic) can be mixed and matched in any combination. Fish sometimes respond better to different colors.



tinsel jig



small plastic worm



in-line spinner



beetle



beetle spin

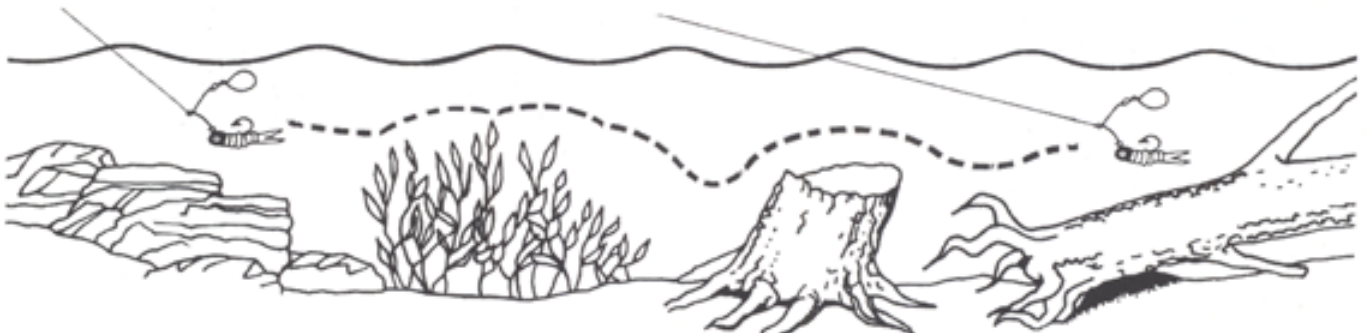


bream killer



popping bug

How to Use an Artificial Lure.



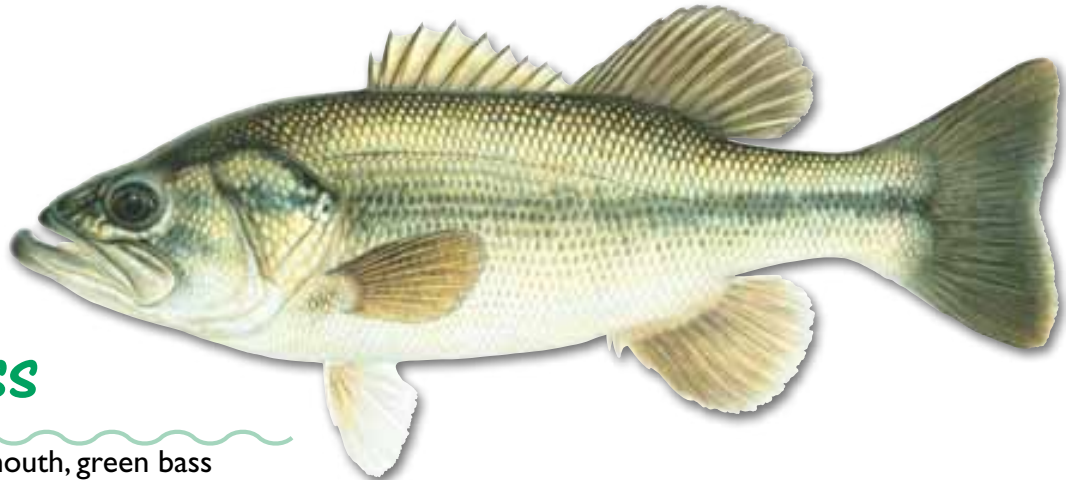
beetle spin

Retrieve near cover.

Black Bass

Black Bass

Bass are popular targets for Arkansas anglers. Three types of black bass live in Arkansas – largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass. Bass live in rivers, streams, lakes and ponds.



Largemouth Bass

Nicknames: Bucketmouth, bigmouth, green bass

Habitat: Found in lakes, ponds, rivers and streams statewide.

They prefer waters with submerged vegetation and flooded timber and brush. In streams, they prefer slow-moving current.

Preferred Water Temperature: 68-78 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 62-68 degrees; April-June

Natural/Live Bait: Minnows, earthworms, crayfish, small fish and frogs

Artificial Lures: Spinner baits, buzzbaits, soft-bodied lures, top-water lures, popping bugs, flies, crankbaits, jigs and spoons



Smallmouth Bass

Nicknames: Brown bass, brownie, bronzeback

Habitat: Clean, cool streams and lakes.

In streams, they like areas with moderate current.

Preferred Water Temperature: 67-71 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 60-65 degrees; April to mid-June

Natural/Live Bait: Minnows, earthworms, crayfish, small fish and frogs

Artificial Lures: Spinner baits, buzzbaits, small soft-bodied lures, top-water lures, popping bugs, flies, crankbaits and jigs

Spotted Bass



Nicknames: Kentucky bass, spots

Habitat: Rivers, streams and deep reservoirs

Preferred Water Temperature: 74-77 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 62-68 degrees; April-June

Natural/Live Bait: Minnows, earthworms, crayfish, small fish and frogs

Artificial Lures: Spinner baits, buzzbaits, soft-bodied lures, top-water lures, popping bugs, flies, crankbaits, jigs and spoons

Black Bass Habitat



Natural/Live Bait



crayfish



minnow



shad



small sunfish



crickets and grasshoppers



earthworms



frogs

Artificial Lures



deep-diving crankbait



grub



spoon



top-water popper



swim bait



lipless crankbait



plastic worm



spinner bait



beetle



top-water prop bait



jig

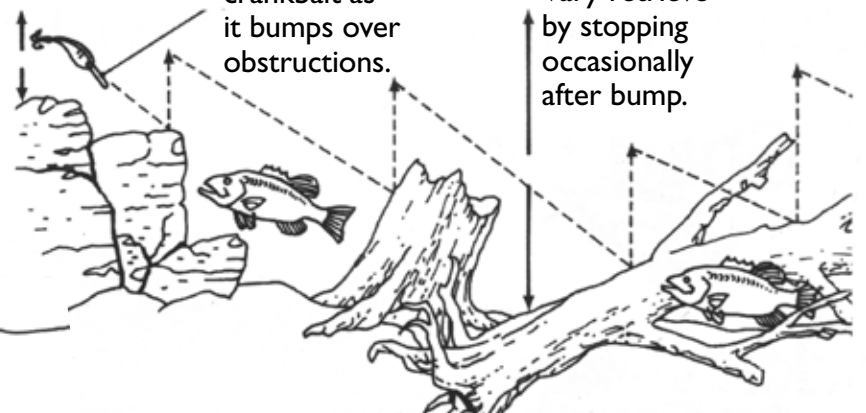
Lure Use and Techniques

crankbait

Fish will hit crankbait as it bumps over obstructions.

Vary retrieve by stopping occasionally after bump.

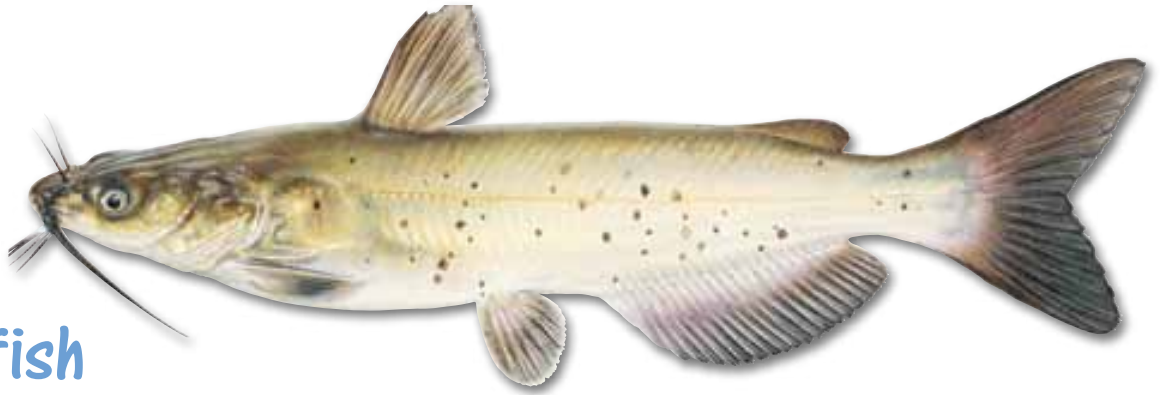
plastic worm



Catfish

Catfish Can Be Caught Almost Any Time

Catfish are abundant in Arkansas's streams, lakes and rivers. They are very easy to catch and are excellent to eat, so they are very popular with anglers. The AGFC stocks about 1 million channel catfish every year. Catfish rarely take artificial lures, but sometimes bite spinners, jigs and spoons.



Channel Catfish

Nicknames: Spotted cat, fiddlers

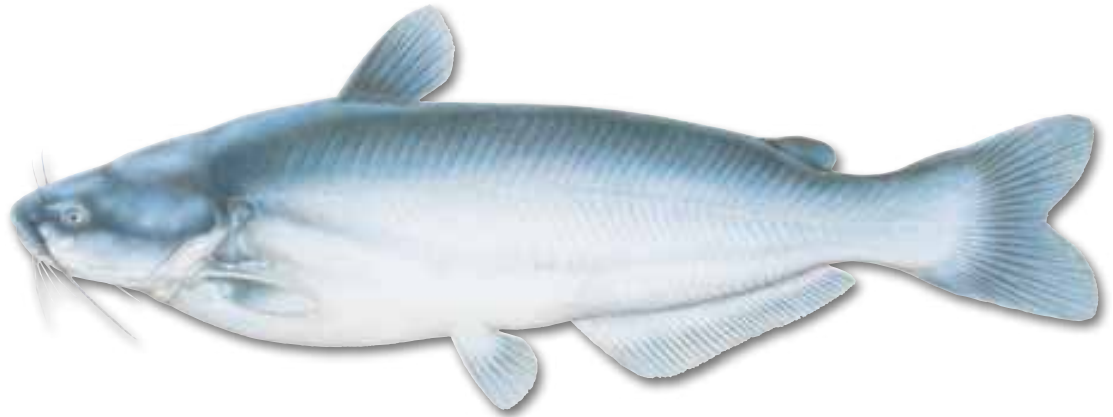
Habitat: Commonly found in big rivers, in current over deep stretches with sand, rock or gravel bottoms. They are stocked in lakes, ponds and streams throughout the state.

Preferred Water Temperature: 75-80 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 70-75 degrees; late April-June

Natural/Live Bait: Earthworms, crayfish, shad and minnows

Prepared baits: Stink bait, blood bait, cheese bait, chicken gizzards, chicken hearts, liver and cut bait



Blue Catfish

Nicknames: Blues, white cat

Preferred Water Temperature: 72-78 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 70-75 degrees; April-May

Natural/Live Bait: Shad, minnows, crayfish

Prepared baits: Stink bait, blood bait, cheese bait, chicken gizzards, chicken hearts, liver and cut bait

Flathead Catfish



Nicknames: Mud cat, yellow cat

Habitat: Flatheads are found in reservoirs and big rivers, often below locks and dams

Preferred Water Temperature: 78-82 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 70-80 degrees; late June-July

Natural/Live Bait: Live fish and minnows

Prepared baits: Rarely caught on prepared baits

Black



Yellow



Brown



Bullheads: Black, Brown and Yellow

Nicknames: Creek cats, mud cats, yellow-cats, black cats, polliwogs

Habitat: Black bullheads are found in still-water streams, lakes and ponds with murky water and soft, muddy bottoms. Brown bullheads are in large, deep lakes, slow-moving streams and ponds.

Yellow bullheads like clear, heavily vegetated lakes, ponds or warmwater streams.

The color of the chin barbels determine the species. Yellow bullheads have yellow or white barbels; black bullheads have black barbels, and brown bullheads have brown barbels.

Preferred Water Temperature: Black, 75-85 degrees; brown, 78-82 degrees; yellow, 75-80 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: Black, 66-70 degrees – May-June;

brown, 70-75 degrees – late May and early June; and yellow, upper 60s or 70s – late spring and early summer

Natural/Live Bait: Earthworms, small fish, crayfish, minnows and goldfish

Prepared baits: Stink bait, blood bait, cheese bait, chicken gizzards, chicken hearts, liver and cut bait.

Catfish Habitat



Natural/Live Bait



crayfish



earthworms



minnows



small sunfish

Prepared Baits



cheese



hearts and liver



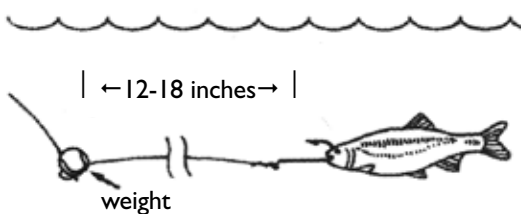
stink baits

How to Rig

There are several ways to rig line to catch catfish. These work in both moving and still water. Prepared baits also can be used with these rigs.

swift, shallow river

Use enough weight to get bait below waterline to the bottom.



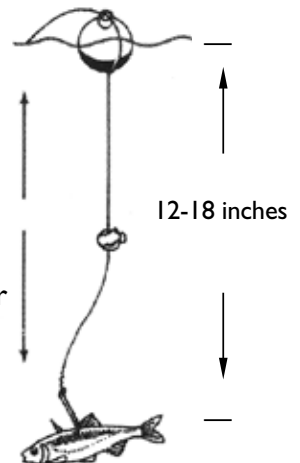
deep, slow-moving river

3-way rig

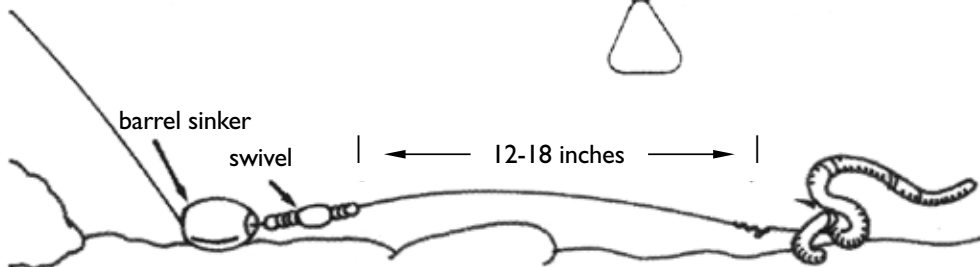


still water

Bobber with light sinker adjusted to a depth so the bait will be near the bottom.



Floating jig head may be used to keep bait off bottom.



Fish can pick up bait and move off without feeling weight of sinker. Swivel acts as a stop.

Crappie

Crappie – Great Sport Fish and Dinner Guest

Crappie have a reputation as one of Arkansas's tastiest fish. They're also simple to catch and offer plenty of action to anglers. Both black and white crappie are found in nearly every body of warm water in Arkansas.



White Crappie

Nicknames: Papermouth, speckled perch, white perch, specks

Habitat: White crappie are found in natural and man-made lakes, as well as large, slow-moving streams

Preferred Water Temperature: 70-75 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 62-65 degrees; April through mid-June

Natural/Live Bait: Small minnows are the best and most commonly used live bait for crappies

Artificial Lures: Jigs, small spinners, plastic/hair grubs and insect imitations

The most reliable method of separating the two is counting the dorsal fin spines. Black crappie normally have seven or eight; white crappie usually have six, but sometimes five. Color is not as dependable, but white crappie are paler, and dark spots on the sides usually are arranged in regular vertical bars. Black crappie are typically darker and have irregular spotting.



Black Crappie

Nicknames: Papermouth, speckled perch, specks

Habitat: Black crappie prefer cleaner, clearer water than their white cousins. Natural lakes and reservoirs with lots of weeds are where you'll find them. They also are found in large, slow-moving rivers.

Preferred Temperature: 70-75 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 62-65 degrees; April through mid-June

Natural/Live Bait: Small minnows

Artificial Lures: Small jigs, tiny crankbaits, spinners and spoons

Crappie Habitat



Crappie Word Search

O	S	W	E	W	T	M	S
E	J	P	H	K	I	V	P
E	I	I	I	N	A	S	E
S	T	P	N	N	D	L	C
E	G	O	P	E	N	O	K
A	W	I	E	A	M	E	S
S	S	W	J	J	R	R	R
B	L	A	C	K	S	C	A

BLACK	SPECKS
CRAPPIE	SPINNER
JIGS	WEEDS
LAKE	WHITE
MINNOWS	

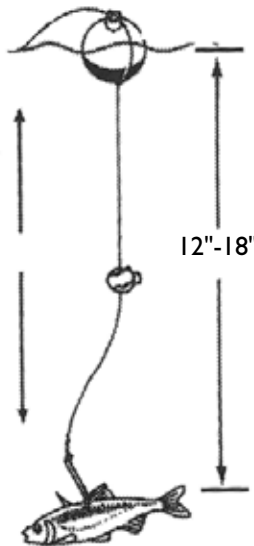
Natural/Live Bait



minnow

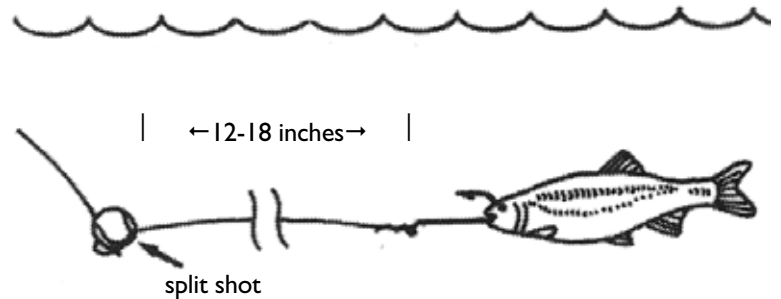
How to Rig

Bobber with
light sinker

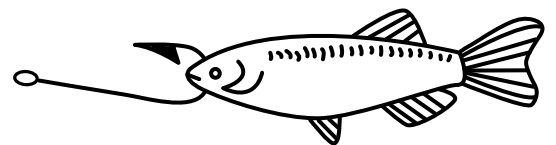
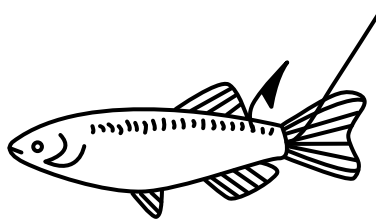
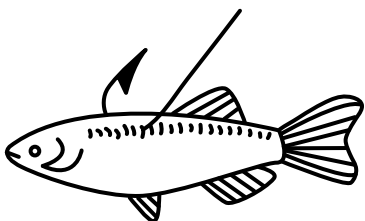


Pinch or
split-shot
sinker

Use just enough weight to get bait below waterline
to the bottom.



Minnows can be hooked through the back, just before the tailfin or through both lips.
Try to keep your minnow alive and moving to attract bigger fish.



Artificial Lures



curl-tail jigs



tube jigs



lead heads



small crankbait



road runner



small spinner bait



hair jig



tinsel jig



critter jig



slider



beetle

Trout

Trout – Coldwater Fishing at Its Finest

Arkansas is blessed with some of the finest trout fishing in America. Trout require cold water and are found on the White River below Beaver, Bull Shoals and Norfork dams. They also are found in the Little Red River, Spring River and the Little Missouri River. Trout are stocked in some Family and Community Fishing Program ponds during winter.

More than 1 million trout are stocked each year in Arkansas.



Rainbow Trout

Nicknames: Rainbow

Habitat: Rainbow trout are found in the main current of the stream, behind obstructions like boulders and fallen trees, vegetation and in deep holes

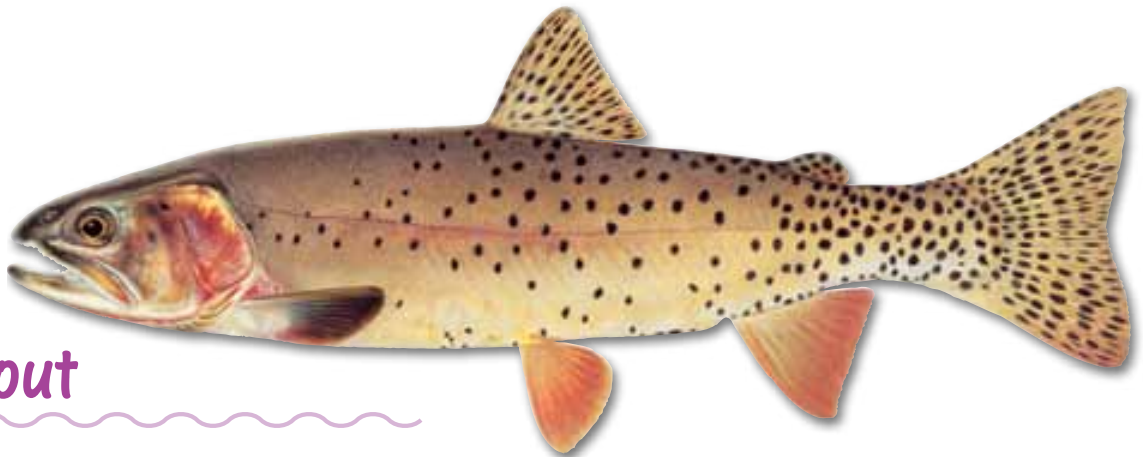
Preferred Water Temperature: 55-62 degrees

Spawning Temperatures and Time: 50-60 degrees; September-January, spawning is rarely successful in Arkansas

Natural/Live Bait: Earthworms, wax worms, crayfish and minnows

Artificial Lures: Spinners, jigs, artificial flies, small crankbaits, spoons and insect imitations

Prepared Baits: Whole-kernel corn, cheese, marshmallows and salmon eggs



Cutthroat Trout

Nicknames: Cutthroat

Habitat: Cutthroat trout are found in the main current of the stream, behind obstructions like boulders and fallen trees, vegetation and in deep holes.

Preferred Water Temperature: 55-62 degrees

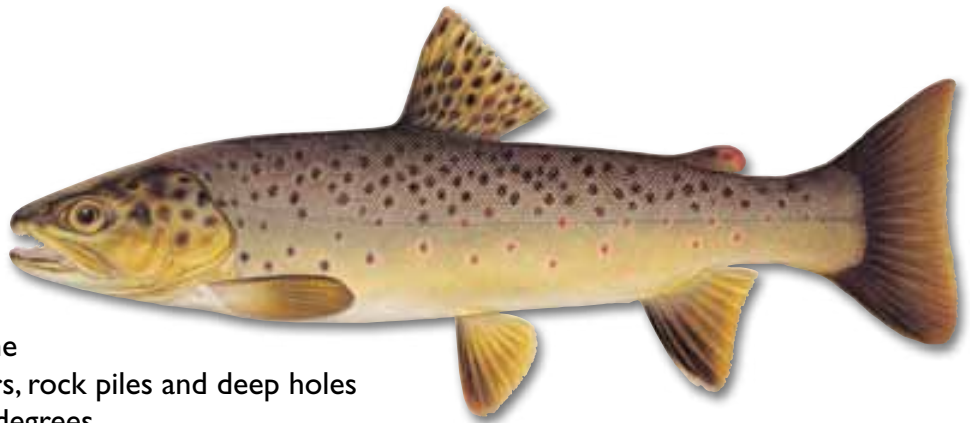
Spawning Temperatures and Time: Spawning is not successful in Arkansas.

Natural/Live Bait: Earthworms, wax worms, crayfish and minnows

Artificial Lures: Spinners, jigs, artificial flies, small crankbaits, spoons and insect imitations

Prepared Baits: Whole-kernel corn, cheese, marshmallows and salmon eggs

Brown Trout



Nicknames: German Brown

Habitat: Brown trout are found among the branches of submerged trees, near boulders, rock piles and deep holes

Preferred Water Temperature: 60-65 degrees

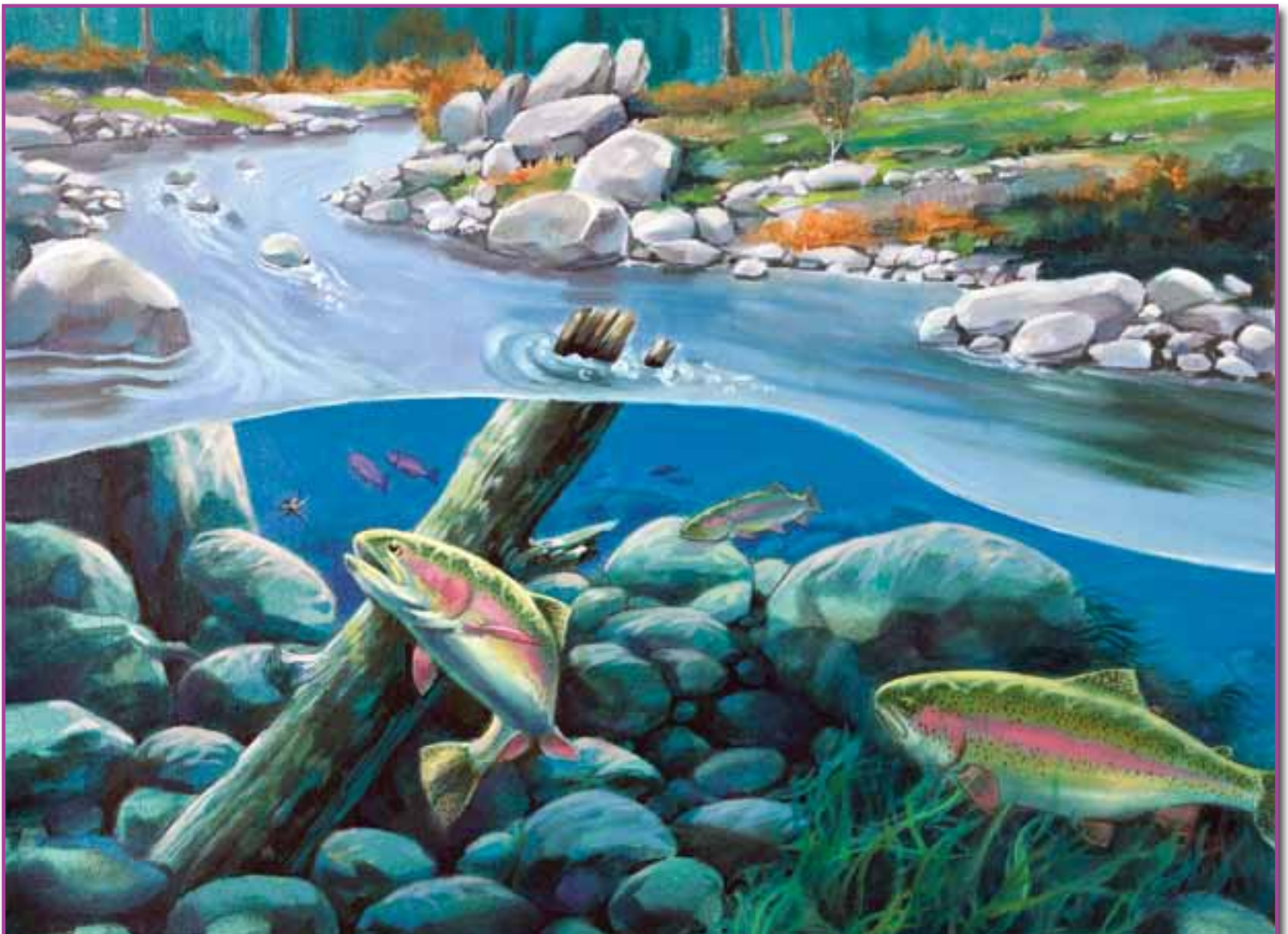
Spawning Temperatures and Time: 44-48 degrees; mid-October through December

Natural/Live Bait: Earthworms, wax worms, crayfish and minnows, sculpins

Artificial Bait/Lures: Spinners, jigs, artificial flies, small crankbaits, spoons and insect imitations

Prepared Baits: Whole-kernel corn, cheese, marshmallows and salmon eggs

Trout Habitat



Natural/Live Bait



crayfish



earthworms



minnow



insect larvae

Grocery Bait



marshmallows



corn

Prepared Bait

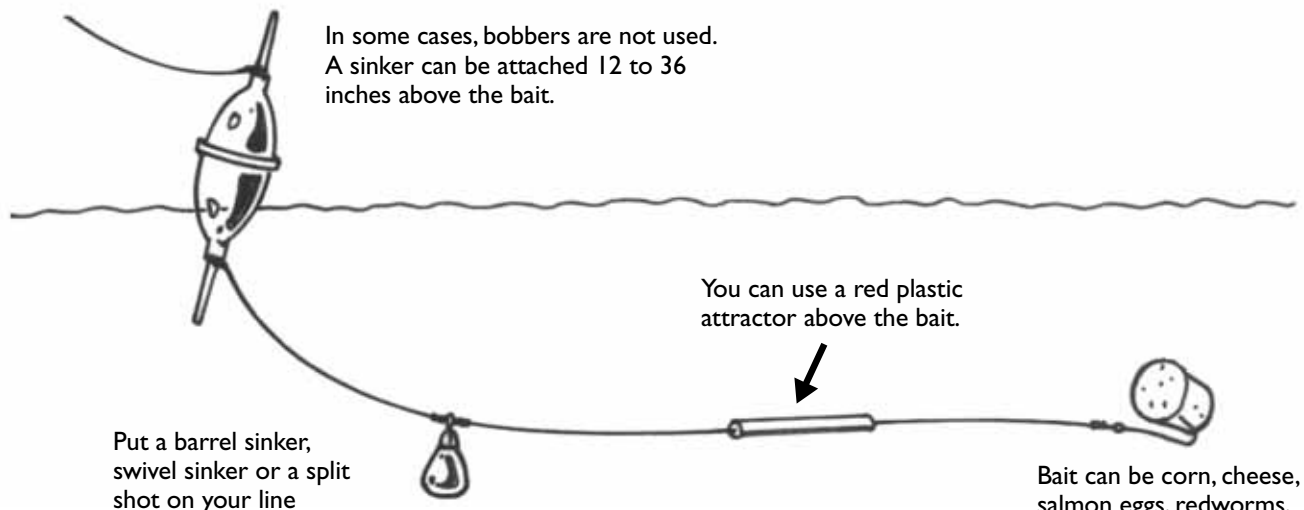


salmon eggs



scented bait

Technique for Using Natural and Prepared Bait



Artificial Lures



minnow bait



marabou jig



in-line spinner



woolly bugger



sowbug



tinsel jig

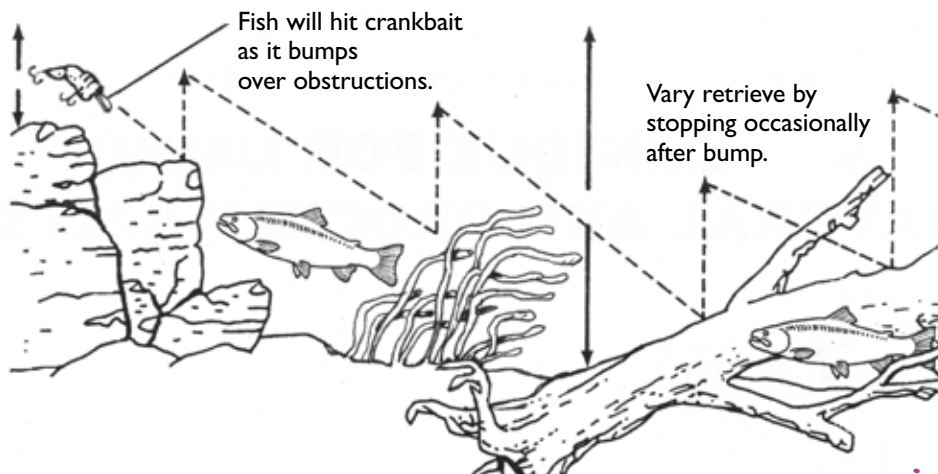


spoon

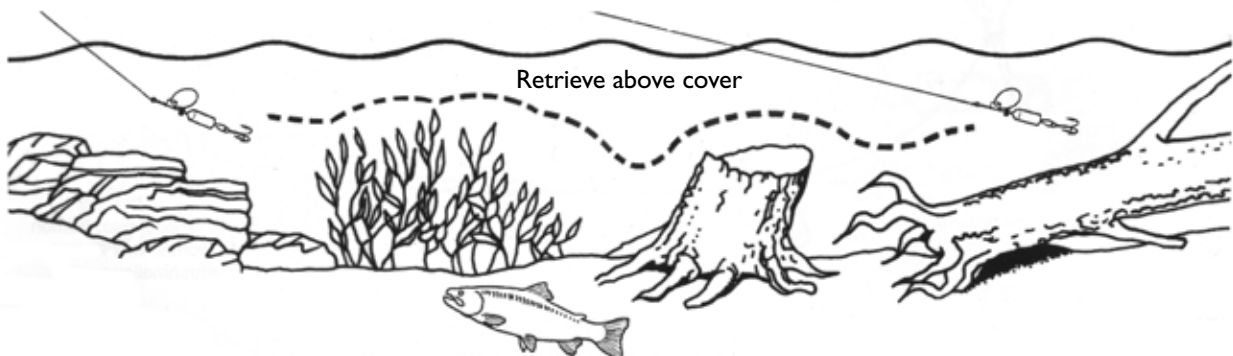


crankbait

Techniques for Artificial Baits and Lures



crankbait



inline spinner

Fishing Tackle and Equipment

Gear to Get Started

You don't need a pricey rod and reel to catch fish. Many anglers do well fishing live bait with a simple cane pole with some line tied to the tip. When you're ready to get more advanced, give the following rod-and-reel outfits a try.

Rod-and-Reel Outfits

Spincast – Called a “push-button” rod and reel. It is inexpensive, simple to use and a good outfit for beginners. Bottom-mounted spincast outfits are available, too.



Spinning – Called an “open-face” reel. It is a good outfit for freshwater fishing. The spool is open and the line is exposed. The reel is mounted to the bottom of the rod.



Baitcasting – Called a “revolving-spool” reel because, unlike spinning reels, the spool turns when the line is cast. Larger models are used to catch catfish and bass. Beginners find this outfit difficult to use and often tangle the line when casting.



Fishing Line

(Type and weight for each species)

Bream

2-lb. to 10-lb. test.

Catfish

6-lb. to 40-lb. test. The size of the line is based on the size of the fish you hope to catch.

Crappie

2-lb. to 10-lb. test.

Trout

2-lb. to 12-lb. test. The size of the line is based on the size of the fish you hope to catch.

Bass

6-lb. to 20-lb. test. The size of the line is based on cover thickness and water clarity.

Bobbers

(Floats, Corks)



There are many sizes and types of bobbers. They usually are made of cork, foam, balsa or plastic.

Tip: Use the smallest bobber possible.

Tools

A set of needle-nosed pliers or nail clippers comes in handy when fishing. Both are excellent for cutting fishing line. Pliers make it easy to unhook fish.



needle-nosed pliers



nail clippers

Sinkers

(Weights)

Note: In a pinch, washers, nuts and rocks can be used as weights.



bullet sinker



pinch sinker



rubbercore sinker



split shot



swivel sinker



barrel/egg sinker

Hooks



short-shank hook



medium-shank hook



long-shank hook

Bream

Short - to long-shanked hooks, sizes 10 to 6

Bass

Medium- to long-shanked hooks, sizes 4 to 3/0

Catfish

Medium- to long-shanked hooks, sizes 4 to 3/0

Crappie

Medium- to long-shanked hooks, sizes 4 to 2/0

Trout

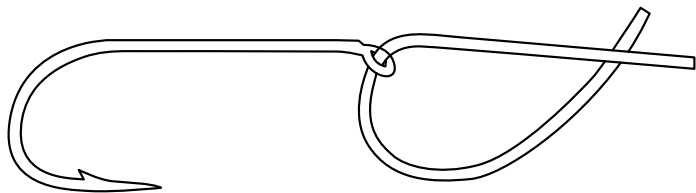
Short- to long-shanked hooks, sizes 12 to 4

Knot-Tying

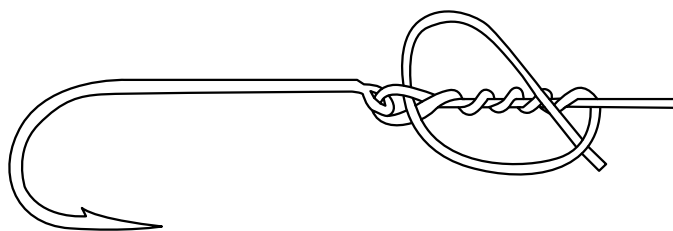
Tangles With Purpose

Fishing line requires special knots to hold the hook or lure securely when a fish is pulling against you. These three knots will cover any fishing situation, and are fairly easy to tie. Practice them at home, so you don't waste fishing time trying to remember how to do it. If your knot doesn't look right, or if your line looks worn or frayed, cut it and retie. Good fish are often lost because of bad knots.

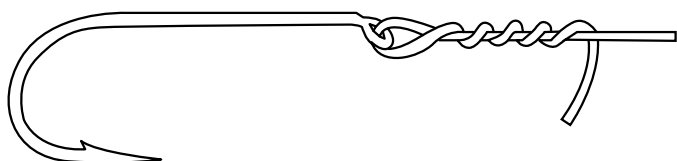
The Fisherman's Knot (Improved Clinch)



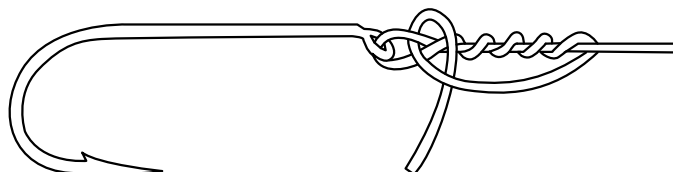
Run several inches of line through the hook eye. Don't be stingy here. Make it comfortable and easy to tie.



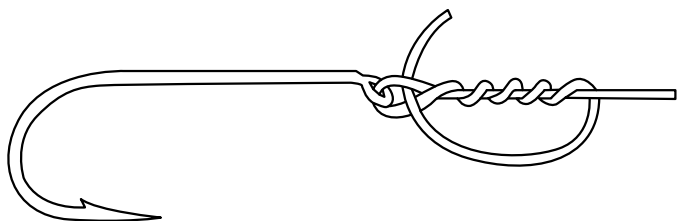
Push the loose end through the new loop you just created. Moisten the knot. This will lubricate the line and make your knot easier to tighten.



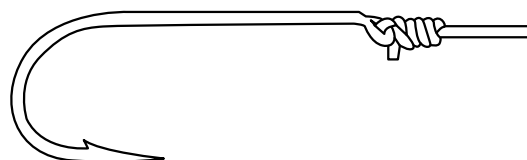
Wrap the loose end of your line around itself five or six times.



Tighten the knot slowly by pulling on the line with one hand and the hook with the other.



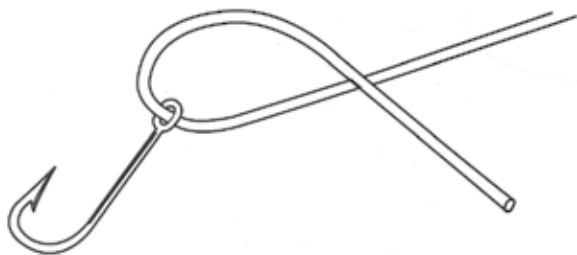
Pass the loose end through the loop in the line next to the eye in the hook.



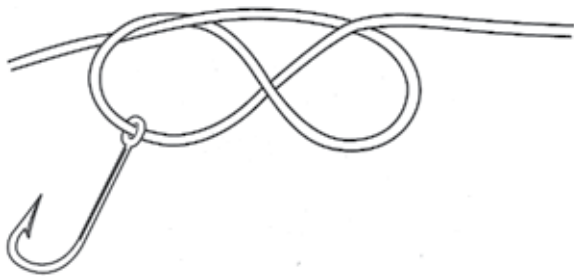
Trim off the loose end of the line with a pair of fingernail clippers.

Figure Eight Knot

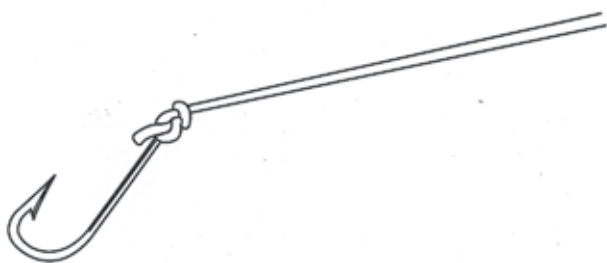
Insert the end of the line through the lure or hook. Bring the end back around and lay it over the standing part of the line.



Pass the end of the line under the standing part of the line. Insert it in the loop that is formed at the eye of the hook or lure. You should see the shape of the figure eight.



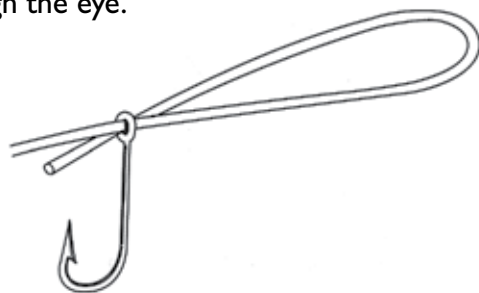
Holding the hook or lure in one hand, pull the standing part of the line with your other hand to secure the knot. Trim the knot, leaving about 1/16-inch of line extending past the knot.



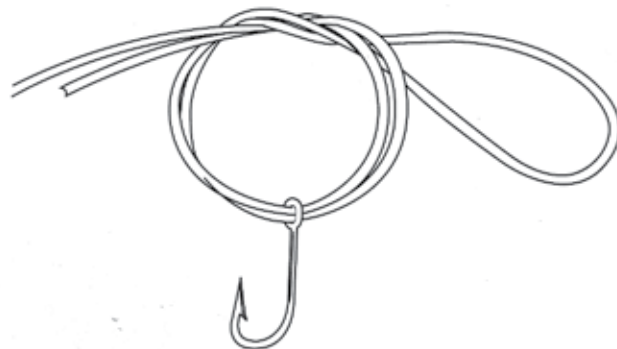
Make sure you know the regulations for each area you may fish. Take a look at the AGFC Fishing Guidebook and familiarize yourself with fishing regulations.

Palomar Knot

Double about 4 inches of line and pass loop through the eye.



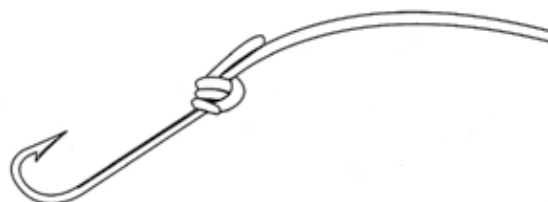
Let the hook hang loose and tie an overhand knot in the doubled line.



Pull loop of line far enough to pass over hook, swivel, or lure.



Pull both ends of the line tight. Moisten before fully tightening. Clip off extra line.



Fishing Tips

Best Time to Fish

You can catch fish any time, but they usually bite best from 30 minutes before sunrise until two or three hours after the sun is up. They get hungry again 30 minutes before sunset and bite well for about an hour or two.



Searching for Fish



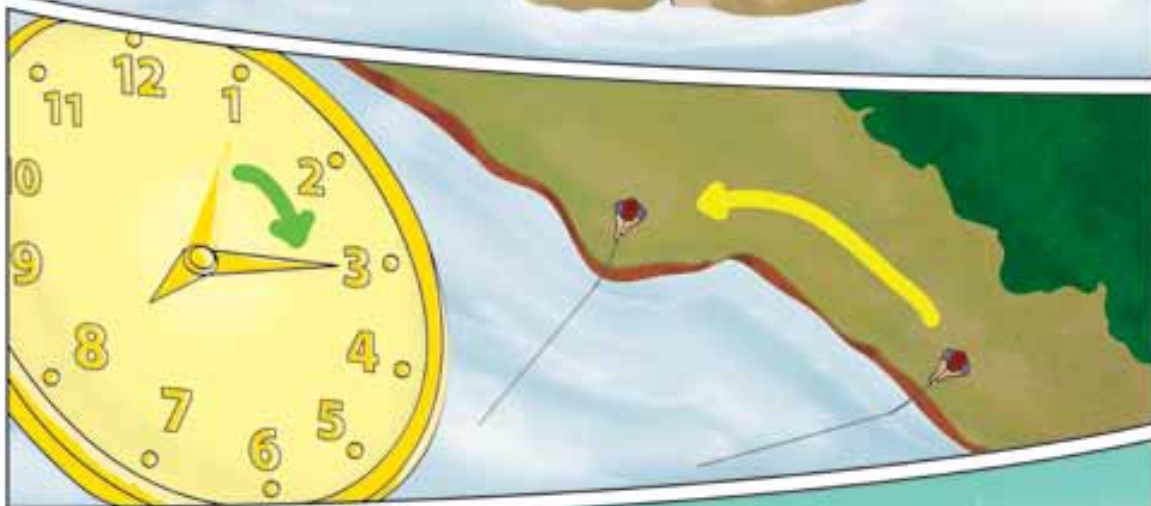
Cast your bait to the left.
Fish about 3 minutes.
No bite?

Now cast in
front of you.
Fish for 3 minutes.
No bite?

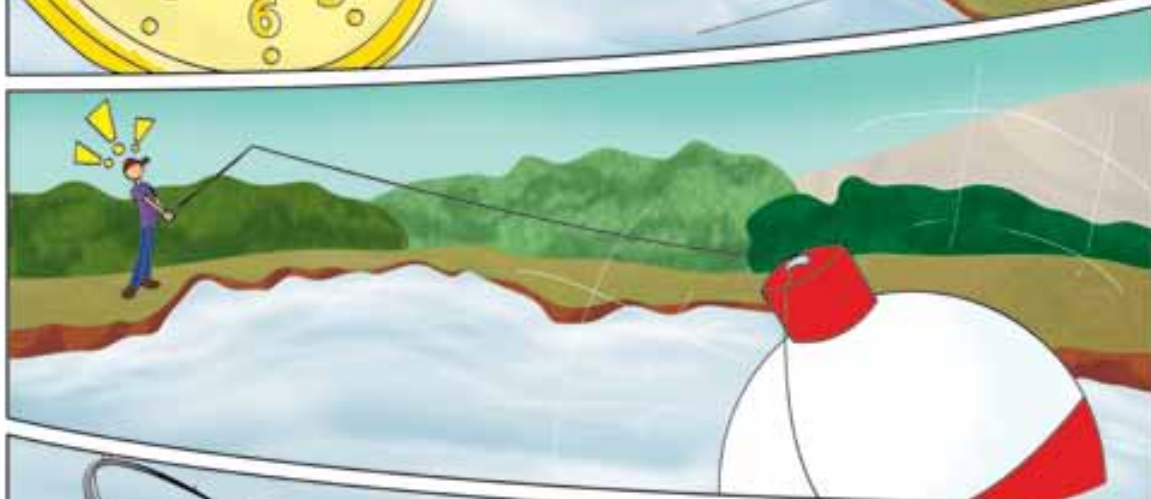
Now cast to the right.
Fish for 3 minutes.
Check your bait.



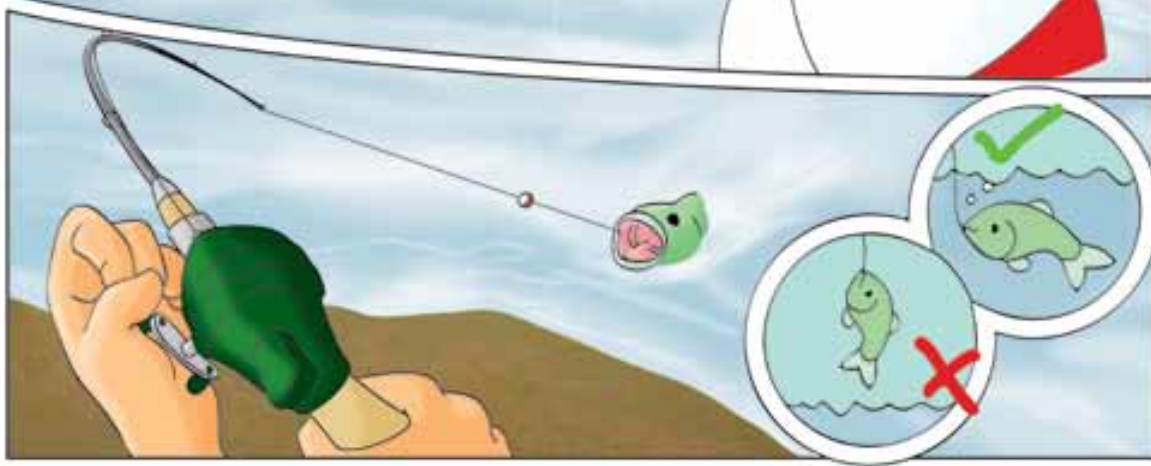
Fish hide around rocks, logs and trees in the water. These are good places to cast your bait.



Fish in one spot for 10 minutes. If you don't catch a fish, Try a new spot about 25 steps away.



Keep the slack out of your line while fishing. When your bobber goes under, you may have a bite.



Move fast. Give a firm pull on the rod. Reel in steadily and drag fish to the bank with the reel. Keep the fish in the water after you catch it.

Safety Tips

Rocks can be slippery and cause you to fall.



Don't stand or walk on logs.



Be careful with fishing hooks. Don't hook yourself or your friends. Hook a FISH!



If your line gets snagged, cut it. Don't yank it.



Always wear your life jacket.



Use sunblock; avoid sunburn.



Learn to recognize poison ivy and poison oak.

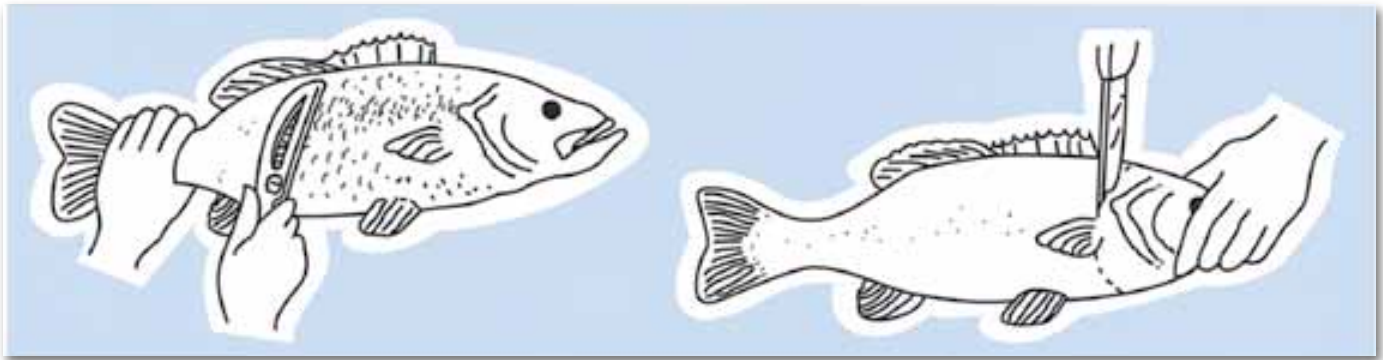


Dispose of trash properly. A broken bottle or jagged can could spoil someone's fishing trip.



Dressing a Fish

Always have an adult help you pan dress and cook your fish.



1. Use a spoon or scaler. Hold the tail firmly and scrape the scales off, always working away from you. Use short strokes scaling tail to head.

2. Remove the fish's head by cutting across the back and behind the fins on each side of the fish.



3. Cut off the bottom front fins and remove any remaining organs.

4. Rinse the fish with fresh water, then put on ice.

Fried Fish

Ingredients

3 pounds fish
2 cups cornmeal
1 cup flour
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon paprika or black pepper (or both)
½ teaspoon red pepper (optional)

Instructions

Soak fish in slightly salty water 30 minutes to one hour before frying. Drain and rinse. Mix ingredients completely. Roll fish in meal mixture. Drop carefully into vegetable oil heated to 350-375 degrees. Fry until fish flakes easily with a fork.



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