

Learn to fish



How to have fun and catch something too!

ontario.ca/fishing

Identifying your catch



Pumpkinseed Sunfish



Bluegill Sunfish



***Black Crappie**



Rock Bass



Smallmouth Bass



Largemouth Bass



Walleye



Yellow Perch



Northern Pike



Muskellunge

* Black Crappie illustration provided by Fisheries and Oceans Canada

Set a Good Example

When you introduce a child to fishing, they learn by copying what you do.

Please set a good example by teaching them how to fish safely and responsibly. The lessons they learn from you will be with them for a lifetime.

Help protect our natural resources for future generations.



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Learn to Fish



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Forward

Busy? How often do you answer, “Yes!” But you want to make time for the children in your life. One way to do that, and connect with the natural world at the same time, is through fishing. Perhaps you’ve never fished, or forgotten how. So even if you wanted to, you may feel you’re too busy to learn enough to make it fun and rewarding. If that’s the case, then this booklet is for you. Whether you’re a parent, or someone who cares enough to help a child, here’s just enough to get you started. Once you’ve tried fishing, we’re betting that you might not want to stop.

Introduction

“Goin’ fishin’...” Those two words can conjure up great memories, and can help to create great times with the children in your life. Don’t know how to fish? No problem – it’s easy! Kids and adults can learn together. Start with the tips and information provided here. Before you know it, you will have shared experiences to last a lifetime.

Ice Fishing

No need to stay inside during the long winter months. Why not be adventurous, bundle up and try ice fishing?

Before you go out on the ice, keep in mind that safety is the number one concern. Check with local authorities, bait shops or local individuals to make sure the ice is thick enough to hold you and your family or friends.

According to the Canadian Red Cross, you should make sure the ice is at least 15 cm or about six inches thick, before walking out alone. The ice should be 20 cm or almost eight inches thick before taking a group out, and 25 cm or almost 10 inches thick before travelling on the ice by snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle.

It’s also important to check the type of ice you are going to walk on. Clear blue ice is the strongest, white opaque or snow ice is half as strong as blue ice and grey ice is unsafe.

After checking for ice thickness and colour, make sure you are well prepared to travel on ice. For safety reasons you should have with you ice picks, a rope, a floatation suit or PFD, waterproof matches, a whistle and proper clothing (dress in layers). Always try to go with someone else so you are not alone on the ice.



Before heading out, also remember to review the current Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary for information about lakes where you can ice fish, as well as species and limits allowed.

Equipment is simple. You will need an augur or axe to make a hole in the ice, and a line with a hook and a minnow or lure. The easiest lines to use are tip ups or you can try a jigging rod available at most angling retailers.

If you decide you want to leave the worry about ice thickness and equipment to someone else, just visit or call your local outfitter who can arrange for you to spend your day ice fishing in a nice warm hut.

Fishing... is good for you

Fishing is an easy to learn, relatively inexpensive hobby that can be practiced almost anywhere, and provides skills that can be used at any age. But fishing is more than catching fish:

- fishing gets you away from everyday distractions
- the relaxed atmosphere and quiet time can help open communications
- fishing together creates common ground and shared experiences
- fishing is an activity at which everyone can succeed at some level
- fishing encourages problem-solving and decision making
- fishing links people and the natural world in a way that can generate caring, responsibility and action



Tips on Trips¹

Few things match the excitement of a first fishing trip. The natural setting, the anticipation and mystery of what may be in the water, and the opportunity to share it with you make it a special moment in a child's life. Here are a few tips to enhance that experience, and keep them eager for future trips:

Relax!

Leave problems behind, and take along a smile, an open mind and a lot of patience.

Basics First

Simple equipment in good working order will help avoid frustration. An inexpensive rod and reel, with live bait and a bobber, will get you off to a good start.

1. Adapted with permission from *Keeping Your Children Drug-free... A Parent's Guide to "Hooked on Fishing, Not on Drugs"* by the Future Fisherman Foundation, Alexandria, Virginia.

Make it a shore thing

Fishing from shore allows kids to run and play when they need to, and gives them an option for fishing on their own or with friends as they get older.

Fish for little fish

Catching fish is important; size isn't. For example, sunfish and other pan-sized fish are often plentiful and easily caught by beginners. Larger fish can be sought when the basic skills are in place.

Make it fun

A fun, safe time is more important than the size or number of fish caught. Praise children for their patience, their cooperation, and simply for trying. If attention wanes, encourage them to look around and explore their natural surroundings.

Teach skills ... patiently

One challenge of fishing is mastering skills. Help kids learn rather than do everything for them – as they develop skills such as knot tying, putting on bait and casting, their self-esteem will increase.

Help solve problems

Lines tangle. Hooks get snagged. Fish stop biting. By working with you to solve these problems and figure out what may cause them, children will be learning what they can try in the future. If they are not catching fish, discuss changing the distance of the bait from the float, moving the bait closer to underwater rocks, logs or weeds, or selecting another bait or lure.





Be flexible

If your child is just too excited to sit still with a bobber and live bait, change tactics. Try a lure they can cast and retrieve. Move up and down the shore looking for good spots.

Be responsible

You are a role model, so set a good example:

- share an awareness of, and respect for, the environment, private property and other anglers
- don't litter – leave the area as good or better than you found it
- discuss the rules and regulations with your child, and follow them
- properly release fish you aren't planning to keep, and make good use of those that you do keep – involve your child from the catch to the table

Don't stay too long

"Always leave 'em wanting more." How much time you spend will depend on the age of your child and whether the fish are biting. Be alert to signs of restlessness and don't be afraid to cut your trip short.

Don't make the first trip your last

Plan another trip. Talk together about what was fun and rewarding, bad and boring, so you can make the trip even better next time.

Keep those promises

A promise to take a child fishing is as important as any other commitment that you make. Keeping that promise will strengthen your relationship.

Remember, each child is different, and will respond differently to the fishing experience. Keep an open mind, go with the flow and, above all, have a good time!



ACTION! Getting Kids Involved

OK, so you're convinced. Now what do you do? For starters, there are countless articles, magazines and books written on all aspects of fishing. In addition, the friendly staff at your local sporting goods or bait & tackle shop will be happy to give you and your child a quick lesson on fishing basics. If you want to be a bit better prepared, the following provides basic information needed to plan, prepare for, and successfully undertake your first fishing trip. After that, you're on your own!

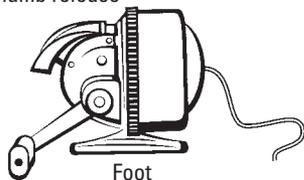
Remember that planning and preparation are all part of the fun, and part of the learning. Involving kids in equipment decisions and purchases will give them a better understanding of some of the whys and hows of fishing, and helps start joint thinking and problem solving at an early age.

Basic Tackle

An inexpensive but effective rod and reel will challenge the budding angler, and allow, with a little practice, considerable range and variety in fishing techniques.



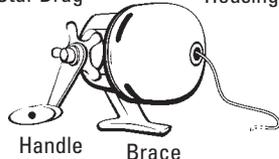
Thumb release



Foot

Several types of reels are available, but the easiest for young kids to use is the spincast reel. This type usually mounts on the top of the rod, has a little hole where the line comes out, and uses a push button or lever to control the cast. Reels should be matched to the size and style of rod, and to the strength of the line used (in pounds of pull before the line breaks).

Star Drag



Housing

Handle

Brace

You can, however, avoid all that matching by buying a combination that includes a rod, reel and line. A good combo for kids would be a light reel on a short (4 1/2 - 5 ft), lightweight rod with 6 to 12 lb. line. The line will be monofilament, a single strand of plastic. It is cheap and easy to use, but care must be taken when attaching things to it

(see knots). A good starter set can be found for under \$30. Avoid the very cheap ones, however, as they are little more than toys, will not stand up under hard use and will not cast as well.

Create A Fishing Kit

Once you have a rod and reel, you need to turn your attention to what is called terminal tackle – the stuff on the end of the line that catches the fish. Here is a basic list of terminal tackle, plus a few things that will come in handy when you go fishing:

Hooks

Hooks are hooks, right? Wrong. You won't believe the variety of hooks available. Stick to single hooks, #6 - #10 (the higher the number, the smaller the hook), with a long shank. These are good for the smaller panfish that you are likely to catch. Once the child gets used to reeling in fish and keeping tension on the line, consider making some barbless hooks by mashing down the barb on the end with pliers. You may lose a few fish, but it will be much easier to remove the hook and there will be less of a problem removing wayward hooks from clothing or skin.



Sinkers

Again, there are many different kinds, but split shot are cheap and versatile. Get several sizes (they come together in a plastic dispenser) of removable shot (they have little tabs opposite the slot for the line), and squeeze them onto the line with your pliers. Most sinkers are made of lead, but more environmentally friendly alternatives (bismuth, tin) are becoming available.

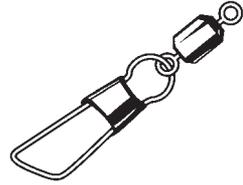
Bobbers

Bobbers or floats attach to the line and do two things: they keep the bait suspended at a particular level, and they jerk or dance to indicate a bite. Small ball bobbers can be clipped on the line at the bottom and the top, and are easiest to use.



Snap Swivels

These do two things as well: they keep the line from twisting, particularly with lures that spin, and when tied to the end of your line, they allow you to easily switch hooks and lures.



Tackle Box

A small tackle box will keep things organized and easy to find. Plastic ones can be inexpensive and won't rust.

Needlenose Pliers

Useful for squeezing split-shot and barbs. Also great for getting hooks out of mouths containing many sharp teeth. You never know when a pike may decide to take your sunfish bait!

Nail Clippers

Good for snipping off the tag ends of knotted line.

Bucket

A great carryall. Besides, you will need something to haul some of those fish home in.

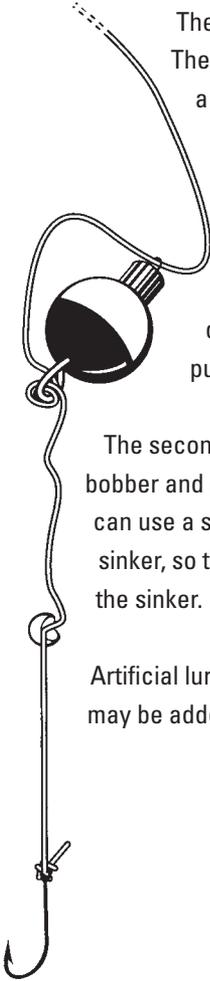
Net

This is an optional item, at least to start. The panfish and other small fish you are likely to catch at first can be lifted straight out of the water, or the hook can be removed without taking the fish out of the water at all.

Camera

Optional as well, but highly recommended for the memories it can capture!

Putting Your Tackle Together

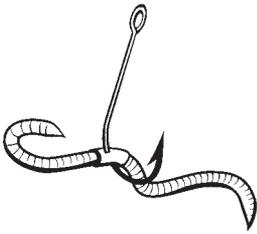


There are two basic rigs that are used for still fishing with bait. The first uses a bobber to suspend the bait above the bottom. Tie a hook onto the end of your line (see knots). Place a split shot about 6" above the hook. Place a bobber at least 6" above the shot. The bobber should float about half-way out of the water. If it doesn't, adjust either the shot amount or the bobber size. Fish may be at different depths at different times. If you don't get much action, try increasing the distance from the bobber to the bait. When all else fails, try putting the bait just above the bottom.

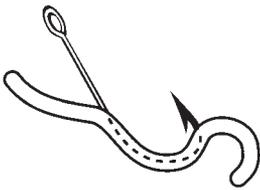
The second rig places the bait right on the bottom. Simply remove the bobber and cast the baited hook and sinker. If you want to get fancy, you can use a sliding sinker instead of the shot. The line runs through the sinker, so that the fish can pick up the bait without feeling the weight of the sinker.

Artificial lures can be attached to the line with a snap swivel. Split shot may be added if you want the lure to run deeper in the water.

The Great “Debait”: Bait vs. Lures

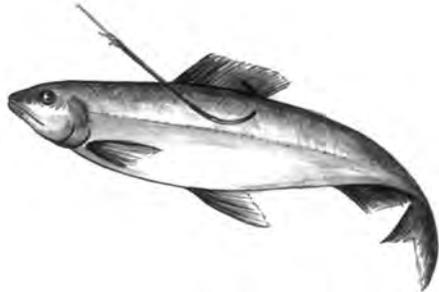


Live bait is cheap, easy to obtain (kids can even catch some themselves) and usually catches more fish in the hands of novice anglers than lures do. However, fish will swallow more hooks with bait, and in some areas live bait is not allowed. Further, live bait generally lies still, which may try the patience of the average youngster. Typical baits include worms, minnows, mealworms and crayfish.



Worms are good to start with, and can be found on lawns at night after a heavy rain. You can use whole worms hooked through the collar, but small panfish are adept at nibbling off worms attached in this way. For such fish, use a small hook covered with just a piece of worm. They can be fished with or without a bobber.

When fishing with minnows in still water, hook the fish shallowly through the back, just behind the dorsal fin. Fish with a bobber, and let the minnow swim just above the bottom or just over the tops of a weedbed.



With any live bait, wait a second or two after the bobber begins to move or the line jerks. This lets the fish take the bait into the mouth before you set the hook.

Lures put more action into your fishing trip, since you need to add some motion to make the lure imitate attractive food. While more of a challenge to cast and retrieve, mastering the motion and actually catching fish is ample reward. Lures can be used over and over, and fish will often not be as deeply hooked. However, losses due to snagging the bottom are more costly (for example, a \$5.00 lure vs. a \$0.15 hook and worm), and it is harder to attract and hook your fish. With any hard-bodied lure, set the hook immediately upon feeling a strike or nibble. Otherwise, the fish will spit out the foreign-feeling lure.

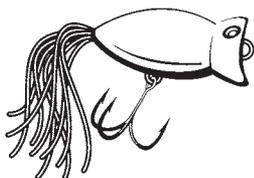
Basic Lures

Crankbaits, Buzzbaits, Poppers, Floater-Divers

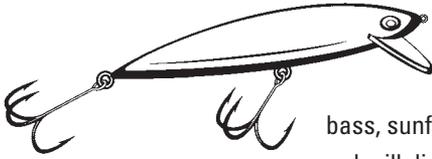
The range of lure types and the variety within each can boggle the mind. Here are several basic types of lures that can be fished by beginners under a variety of conditions:

Plugs

These mostly hard-bodied, wooden or plastic lures come in all shapes and sizes, and can imitate almost anything that can swim and be eaten. Further, different plug types are designed for different water depths. Topwater lures or poppers splash and dance across the surface, pretending to be frogs, mice or struggling minnows.



A *float*/*diver* plug floats, but has a plastic lip on the front which makes it wiggle and dive when pulled. Using a pull/stop, pull/stop motion will make the lure resemble an injured minnow trying to swim down into the water, only to



float back up again. These lures rarely go more than a foot under water, and can be used over weedy shallows containing

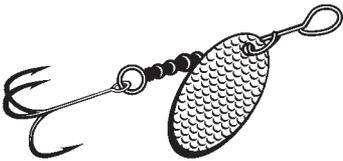
bass, sunfish and perch. Crankbaits have a larger lip, and will dive deeper, the depth depending on the size

of the lip and the weight of the plug. They may find largemouth

bass, walleye or pike lurking near the bottom.

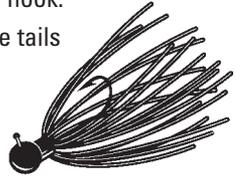
Spoons and Spinners

These lures use a wobbling or spinning metal blade to mimic injured baitfish. Their weight allows an accurate cast, especially when it is windy. They run deeper than the floating plugs, and can be used to catch any fish-eaters. They can be reeled in steadily, or retrieved in jerks. Caution: since spinners 'spin', always use a snap swivel to avoid line twist.



Jigs

A jig is basically a metal head (often eyed) attached to a hook. Jigs may be sold with a tail made of hair or plastic, or the tails can be bought separately. Jigs are fished off the bottom by lifting the rod tip and dropping it again as the lure is slowly reeled in. The idea is to have the lure dance across the bottom looking again like food in distress.



Soft Plastic Lures

These lures feel very life-like to your fish, so they may hold on to it longer. They come in many shapes, and often need to be fit to a hook or jig much like the live bait that they mimic. Often, they incorporate a smell that also attracts fish. Some flutter and vibrate when retrieved. Others, like worms, must be retrieved slowly along the bottom for best effect. These worms can be rigged to avoid weeds (for example a Texas rig) and fished through the weed beds.



Practice, Practice, Practice ...

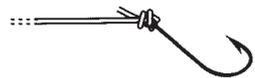
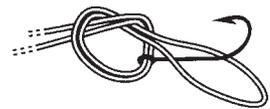
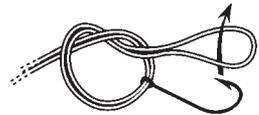
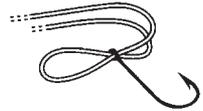
Two activities should be practiced before your trip: knots and casting. Knots can be used to prepare your terminal tackle ahead of time; practice casting will iron out some kinks and promote better fishing through more accurate casts.

Knots

Two things about knots in monofilament fishing line: they can slip out, and they can break. Several knots can be used to avoid these hazards, but the simplest for small hands to learn is the palomar. Start with a thin piece of rope or twine and something with a hole (scissors, coffee cup, eyebolt), then move onto fishing line and hooks after the basic process is mastered.

The steps:

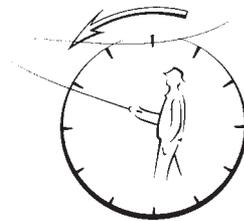
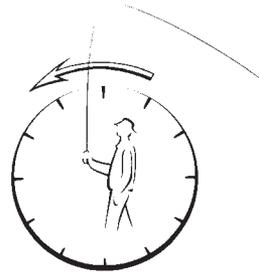
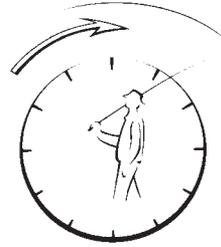
- 1 Double the line back on itself, forming a long narrow loop; feed the end of the loop through the hole.
- 2 Tie an overhand knot (end of loop around doubled line) but don't pull it tight.
- 3 Put the hook through the narrow end of the loop.
- 4 Moisten the line where the knot is being created; slowly pull the knot tight, and clip off the free end of the line, leaving at least 1/8" of leftover line.



Casting

A little work in the back yard will save a lot of frustration by the water. The basics of spincasting are simple. The trick is knowing when to let go:

- 1 Tie a sinker or a casting plug onto your line (a hookless plug, available from your tackle shop, won't hurt as much if you bonk something, or someone, or the dog).
- 2 Reel the plug up to the rod tip. Push down on the button and then release it. The plug will plummet to earth. Begin to reel in (you may have to pull slightly on the line near the reel to get it to take up until gravity kicks in). You will hear a click. This engages the drag and keeps the line from freely running out again. Reel the plug to within 6" of the rod tip. Now you are ready to apply what you just learned to an actual cast.
- 3 Stand facing away from all windows, trees and small animals, holding the rod in front of you at about 10 or 11 o'clock. Keeping your elbow bent at a 90 degree angle, hold the button down and move the rod tip back over your shoulder, bending your wrist back to put the tip at about 1 or 2 o'clock.





- 4 Snap your arm and wrist forward, pointing the rod tip at the target and releasing the button at 10 or 11 o'clock. The plug should arc smoothly toward the target. If you overcast and it heads for your neighbour's picture window, press down on the button again. This will stop the line and the plug will drop straight down.
- 5 If the plug arcs too high and drops short, you released the button too soon. If it doesn't arc and drives into the ground, you released too late. Fiddle with your release point until you can drop the plug into a 6' diameter circle from varying distances.

Safety

Accidents and even minor incidents can lessen the enjoyment of your trip, but a few precautions and additions to your equipment list will reduce the chances that your trip will be memorable, but for the wrong reasons.

Hats

If shade is unavailable, hats will increase the amount of time that you can stay in the direct sun. Consider broad brims that circle the hat.



Sunscreen

Even with hats and long sleeves, reflected sun from the water will strike your face. On warm days, comfortable clothing (tee shirts, shorts) will leave lots of exposed skin to be protected by sunscreen.

Insect Repellent

Water and bugs go together, and certain seasons (Spring) and times of day (dawn, dusk) that can be particularly good for fishing are also mealtime for the little critters. A good repellent will limit their effects, but not eliminate them. So as you occasionally swat, comfort

yourself with the fact that if there weren't any bugs, there wouldn't be any fish. Cautionary note: Some children may react to repellents. Check with your doctor or pharmacist if you have concerns. Some repellents will also weaken monofilament fishing line, take off lure paint, gum up plastic lures and repel fish, so rinse your hands before touching anything.

Life Jackets (PFDS)

Even if you are fishing from shore, life jackets or personal floatation devices (pfd's) are a good thing to have for small children or weak swimmers. Of course, they don't do much good unless they're on and properly fitted. Find places to fish where the water is shallow near shore and the bottom slopes gradually. This will also allow kids to wade around and search for bugs and things if the fishing is slow.

First Aid Kit

With a basic first aid kit you can handle the occasional nicks and scrapes. Be sure to include a spray or salve for insect bites and stings, as well as any special medications that the child may require, for example allergy or asthma medicine.

Hooks and Casting

Hooks must be sharp, and are the most likely cause of accidents while fishing. Barbed hooks create special concerns. Handle all hooks carefully, and teach kids to always look behind them before casting. A hook in a bush is bad enough – a hook in your skin is worse. If a hook penetrates below the barb, get medical help.

Footwear

Plan on feet ending up in the water. If the weather's warm, consider old shoes that you don't mind getting wet. In cooler weather, waterproof boots are a good idea.



Ethics and Respect

We all want children to respect our natural environment. Kids need to see that our aquatic resources belong to all of us, and that we all need to take care of them. It is pretty easy to see that if we don't take care, we may not have fish to catch in the future. What may be harder to get across is the basic respect that all living things deserve, even those, perhaps especially those, that we may kill to eat. Perhaps the best way to instill this attitude is to model this behaviour yourself as a caring adult. Some things to consider:

- **Don't litter.** Litter is not only unsightly, but it can harm fish, birds and other living things. Fishing line is particularly bad. Take back everything that you brought on your trip, and consider leaving the area better than you found it.
- **Have fun,** but don't be overly loud or boisterous. These behaviours not only spook other anglers, they spook the fish as well.
- **Obey the law.** Be sure you have the current Ontario Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary (available from fishing licence issuers – check your local bait and tackle, sporting goods or hardware stores). Know and be prepared to explain the rules and abide by the limits and other regulations contained in the Summary. Show older kids how to use the Summary themselves. You will also need to know how to identify some common Ontario fish. Illustrations are available on the inside front and back covers, and these fish are described later.



- **Keep only those fish that you plan to eat**, and handle them carefully (see Landing and Handling). Release the others quickly and properly. Your Summary has good tips on proper release techniques.
- **Discuss** other, less direct things that can affect fish and their habitat. Recycling, not putting chemicals, soaps or detergents down drains, and not destroying shoreline vegetation will all benefit fish in the long run.

Now You're Fishin'

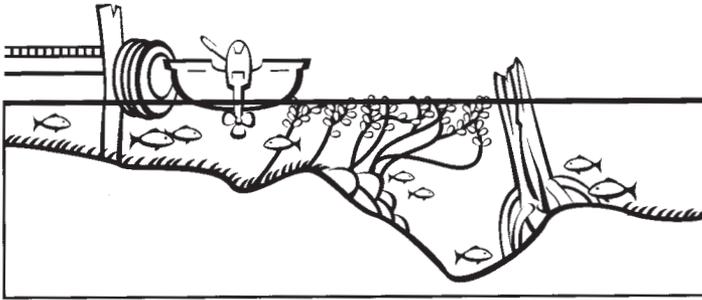
Good planning, practice and preparation are essential, but the act of fishing can only be done on site. Following the steps below will assure you that your trip will be fun, and that your chances of catching fish will be as good as they can be.

Remember, the point of being there is to help and guide the young angler. Match the amount of help to the age of the child and the amount of experience that he/she has gained.

In Ontario, children below the age of 18 can fish without a licence and take home a full limit of fish if they wish. Adults between 18 and 64 are required to have a licence. If the young angler needs a lot of help, or you want to do a little fishing too, consider a Conservation Licence. It costs much less than a regular licence, since it allows you to take reduced limits of most fish species.

Finding a Good Spot

Fish are not distributed evenly throughout a lake or stream. Proper site selection may have more to do with fishing success than anything else you try. Ask your fishing friends, MNR Office, local Conservation Authority, or bait and tackle dealer for a good panfish (i.e. sunfish and other smaller fish) locations within 1/2 to 1 hour of home. Small lakes or ponds that have public access are probably better places to start than streams. When you get there, walk along the shore. Look for what is called structure: places where fish might hide or find food. Structure includes rock piles, drowned trees, the edges of weed beds, places where the shallows drop quickly off to deeper water and dock pilings. Also try stream or creek mouth areas.²



Method Selection

How you fish will depend on what fish you are after. With bait, rig a float for sunfish, or fish the bottom for catfish, carp or suckers.

Careful Casting

That first cast can be truly exciting, so much so that all else is forgotten. Your job is to remind your child to: look behind before casting, when to release and where to cast.

2. Please remember to respect private land.



Line Control

When fishing with bait, keep it still. Don't move the bait around, or jerk the rod tip. Keep the line fairly tight (a direct line to the bait or bobber; little of the line coil showing) without pulling on the terminal tackle. Keep the rod at about a 45 degree angle.

Watch for Nibbles

Here's where you can really be a help. Unless a fish hits almost immediately, young eyes tend to wander. By keeping your eye on the line or rod tip, you can bring that attention back when things start to happen.

Setting the Hook

This is a skill which will come with experience. When using bait, remember to wait a bit until the bobber goes under, or the line begins to move off. Set the hook by firmly snapping the tip of the rod back over the shoulder. With most lures, remember to set the hook right away. Treat artificial worms like live bait.



Playing the Fish

Reel in steadily, keeping the rod tip up. Avoid the temptation to rush, or to increase the drag (a knob or dial on the reel which increases or decreases the resistance to pulling line out) if the fish takes off. Just hold the tip up and let the fish tire. Increase the drag slightly only if you can't reel in at all. With too much drag the line may break. Quickly reel in any slack. Be ready for another short burst when the fish becomes aware of you or sees your net.

Landing and Handling

Landing is easiest with a net. Keep the net stationary, below the fish in the water. Guide the fish over the net and then raise it up. Panfish can be lifted straight out of the water, but may flip off the hook as they come up. Bass can be lipped – grasp the lower lip firmly between thumb and index finger and lift the fish out of the water. Support the fish with your other hand under its belly if you hold it out horizontally. Landing the fish is something that you can do at first while the child keeps the line snug and the rod tip up. More experienced children can land the fish themselves.

All fish should be handled carefully and with respect. Take particular care with fish that will be released. In many cases, they don't even have to come out of the water as you work the hook out. If you want to take the fish out of the water, e.g. for a photograph, use wet hands and hold your breath. Carefully grasp the fish from one side, folding down the sharp dorsal fins (catfish have spines by their front fins as well). Put the fish back before you need a breath. Check the Ontario Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary for more details on proper release.

Keeping Your Catch

For good eating quality, you must either keep fish alive or cold. A few sunfish can be kept in a bucket with a frequent change of water, or in a wire mesh live basket. Larger fish can be put on a fish stringer with a line or a clip that is put through the fish's lower lip. Fish can also be kept under ice in a cooler. Kill the fish first with a sharp rap between the eyes, using a sawed-off bat handle or other round piece of wood.

Identifying Your Catch

To make sure your catch is within the law, you must be able to identify it. In addition, learning together about each type of fish can be fun, and will help in deciding where and how to fish for it. The following information describes the fish you are most likely to catch as a beginning angler. On the inside front and back covers, you will find pictures of each fish described on the following pages.

Best Bets

Panfish: Sunfish, Rock Bass and Black Crappie

These colourful little scrappers are abundant in many Ontario waters. They usually weigh four to eight ounces, but can grow as big as a pound or two. They are very flat, almost in the shape of a hand.

Aggressive feeders, sunfish take bait readily, fight well on light tackle and are considered to be very fine eating. They can generally be found in the shallows of warmer lakes, ponds and slow-moving streams. Try fishing near rocks, weedbeds, floating docks or anything else that would give them a place to hide. Rock bass, as the name implies, prefer rocky areas. Stillfish using a bobber and worms, adjusting the depth of the bait until you find where they are. You can also try small plugs, spinners or jigs. Black crappie in particular seem to like live minnows. Their mouth tissues, however, are fairly thin, and hooks may rip out unless played with a delicate touch.

Yellow Perch:

This smaller cousin of the walleye is a very popular panfish, and is often found with the sunfish. However, they aren't as tied to structure, and will travel in schools looking for food. So cast widely, and if you find one, chances are you will find lots. Perch take all sorts of live bait (particularly minnows) and small lures (try spinners and jigs 'sweetened' with worm pieces) and are fine eating.

Average size is about one third of a pound, but perch of a pound or more are regularly caught and examples of perch weighing up to two pounds are not uncommon.

Bass: Largemouth and Smallmouth

As the names imply, the easiest way to tell these two fighters apart is the size of the mouth. In largemouth, the jaw hinge extends beyond its large, distinctive eye. In the smallmouth, it doesn't go beyond the centre of the eye. And while the two fish sometimes overlap territories, largemouth are more commonly found in warmwater weedbeds.

Largemouth like to hide in the weeds and ambush their prey, so drop your lure or bait near the edges of the beds. Worms – real or artificial – often work best. Work your bait around any logs, boulders or other potential hiding spots.

The largemouth averages one to three pounds but fish weighing five or six pounds are caught in Ontario each year.

The scrappy smallmouth bass lives in cool, clear water across much of the province, preferring the rocky and sandy areas of the lakes and rivers. Look for rocky points, shoals, slopes and submerged logs. Fish deeper during the hotter parts of the summer. Almost any bait or type of lure may work, but crayfish are often a preferred food.

Smallmouth are strong fighters which occasionally put on astonishing top-water acrobatic displays. Average weight is a pound or two, but five and six pound fish are caught each year.



Bottom Fish: Catfish and Carp

Place your bait directly on the bottom to hook these sometimes overlooked fish.

The brown bullhead, also called mudcat, sports brown barbels, or whiskers, on its chin and has a square tail. The average bullhead weighs somewhere between a half-pound and a pound, but it may reach weights of over two pounds. Its reddish-coloured flesh is surprisingly sweet and tasty and is considered a delicacy by many anglers.

The bullhead is most often found in shallow, warm water over sandy or muddy bottoms. It is most active at night. As bottom feeders, catfish feel for food with their sensitive “whiskers”, or barbels. Still fishing with bait works best. Simply allow your bait to rest on the bottom and wait.

The channel catfish is a larger cousin of the bullhead. It has a deeply forked tail and is primarily a river fish, often caught at night in fast-moving water. Fish as you would for brown bullheads, or use dead baitfish. Spinners and minnow-shaped plugs work, too.

The carp is a European native, released in North America back in the 1800's. It is a hard-fighting fish that's lots of fun to catch.

Carp like shallow, warm weedy water. Carp, like catfish, are bottom feeders, feeling for food with their sensitive “whiskers”, or barbels. Still fishing with live bait works best, and they will take even simple baits such as doughballs. Simply allow your bait to rest on the bottom and wait.

The carp has large scales, almost like a coat of armour. Its average weight is about four pounds, but fish up to 20-30 pounds are not uncommon.



You might find ...

Pike or muskellunge:

The northern pike is common over much of Ontario. It is an active, aggressive predator and popular gamefish. Slim and streamlined, it has a very pointed snout and a mouth filled with very sharp teeth.

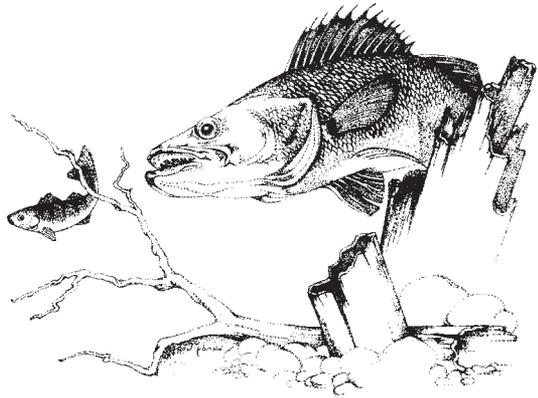
The pike is often found in shallow, weedy warm water. If hungry, pike may hit anything that moves, and are often caught by trolling or casting in or near weed beds using spoons, plugs or bucktail spinners. In mid-summer, try still fishing with baitfish in deeper water off the edges of weed beds. Its flesh is very tasty, but it takes a little time and skill to remove its numerous bones prior to cooking.

Pike are usually about two to four pounds in weight, but fish 10 to 20 pounds are not uncommon in Ontario.

Muskellunge, or muskie, have the same general shape and behaviour as pike, but tend to be striped instead of spotted. They also grow much larger. Knowing the difference is important, since muskie are much rarer, more prized as a gamefish, and consequently have more restrictive size and catch limits.

Walleye:

The walleye, sometimes called pickerel or yellow pickerel, is the most popular gamefish in Ontario. It has a mouth full of small, very sharp teeth. The eyes, which give it its name, are very large and placed toward the top of the head. Average weight of the walleye is a pound or two, but specimens of 5 to 10 pounds in weight are regularly caught in Ontario.



Walleye are found in most Ontario waters, but like large, shallow lakes and large streams or rivers. Because of their light-sensitive eyes, they feed well in cloudy water, but are often found in deeper water than other fish. During the day, use live minnows or lures such as spinners, crankbaits and jigs. Fish near the bottom around weed beds, boulder shoals and sunken logs. At night, try your luck in shallower water as well.

Other Gamefish

Trout and Salmon:

This large family of related sportfish can generally be identified by a streamlined shape, lack of spiny fins and a tiny fin on the back near the tail. All prefer cold water, and most can be found in streams at some time in their life.

Brook, rainbow and brown trout are commonly stream-dwellers, although rainbows and browns are also found in the Great Lakes, and brook trout in deeper inland lakes. Brook trout prefer clear, cool streams, and are often found in shady, spring-fed, headwater areas. While live bait and other lures will work, brook trout are especially popular with fly fisherman. Average weight in streams is less than a pound, but brook trout can grow as large as 10 pounds.

Rainbow and brown trout can tolerate slightly warmer water than brook trout and can be found in the lower reaches of brook trout streams. In small bodies of water, the rainbow usually weighs less than a pound or so, but it can reach weights of 15 pounds or more in the Great Lakes or its tributary streams and rivers. In summer, 'bows' are most often found in the lower parts of large, swift, rocky rivers and in the deeper waters of lakes. Flies are commonly used in streams, but almost any lure or natural bait may be struck.

Another important gamefish, the brown trout is a golden brown colour when found in streams and rivers. In lakes its colour fades almost to silver. Its weight ranges from 2 to 12 pounds but fish of over 20 pounds have been caught in the Great Lakes.

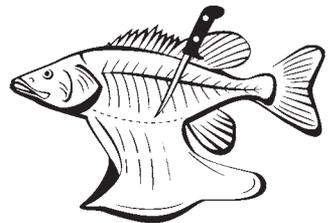
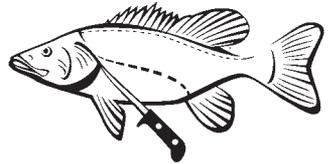
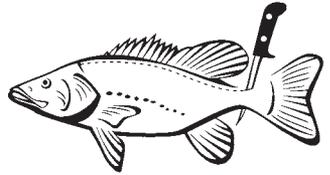
Lake trout most often live in the deeper waters of the Great Lakes and other cold, deep lakes. During the summer, 'lakers' require specialized fishing gear and techniques to get bait or lures down to the fish.

Chinook and Coho salmon are recent introductions from the Pacific Northwest. Although they use streams for breeding, they spend a large part of their life in the Great Lakes. Since they are often found in deep water, they usually require special equipment and support a thriving charter boat fishery in Lake Ontario and other Great Lakes.

Cleaning and Cooking³

There is special satisfaction in bringing home and eating fish that you have caught yourself. Involving young anglers in this process will reinforce those feelings and show the positive results of their efforts. The easiest preparation method is to fillet the fish. Carefully done, it results in boneless flesh that is easy for kids to eat.

What you need is a sharp filleting knife (with a narrow blade that is easy to maneuver around the ribs). Start at the top of the fish just back of the gill cover. Cut down to the spine, just to one side of the dorsal fin. Work back until you reach the end of the fin. Then cut down through the fish to a point just behind the vent and slice along the backbone to the tail. Make a cut from the top of the fish to its belly, just behind the gill cover. While pulling the fillet away from the fish, run the blade parallel to the ribs to finish cutting off the meat. Remove the skin by pulling it back and slicing it away with the knife. Caution: leave a small patch of skin on fillets when transporting so each fish can be identified by a Conservation Officer.



3. Most fish caught in the province are safe to eat, particularly panfish and smaller sportfish. However, pollution may be a concern in some fish from some locations. Obtain a copy of the *Guide to Eating Ontario Sport Fish* from the Ministry of Environment, and check the consumption guidelines for the lake or stream where you plan to fish.



Cooking fish does not have to be elaborate. The best fish are fresh fish. Simply dip the fish in beaten eggs or milk, then in flour or bread crumbs, and fry in cooking oil, butter or margarine. Don't overcook – the fish is done when the flesh turns white and can be easily flaked apart.

As you eat your fish, begin to plan your next trip...

My Fishing Log



Date _____

Species caught _____

Size _____

Bait/Lure _____

Spot _____

Comments _____

Identifying your catch



Brook Trout



Brown Trout



Rainbow Trout



Lake Trout



Chinook Salmon



Coho Salmon



Brown Bullhead



Channel Catfish



Carp

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Ontario Family Fishing Weekend, February 14-16, 2015 and Ontario Family Fishing Week, July 4-12, 2015



Canadian residents can fish licence-free only during the Ontario Family Fishing Weekend and the Ontario Family Fishing Week. Take a child to a local event or relax by a neighbourhood stream or pond and "catch the fun." People without a licence must follow Conservation Licence Limits. www.ontariofamilyfishing.com



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