



State of Illinois  
Illinois Department of Natural Resources

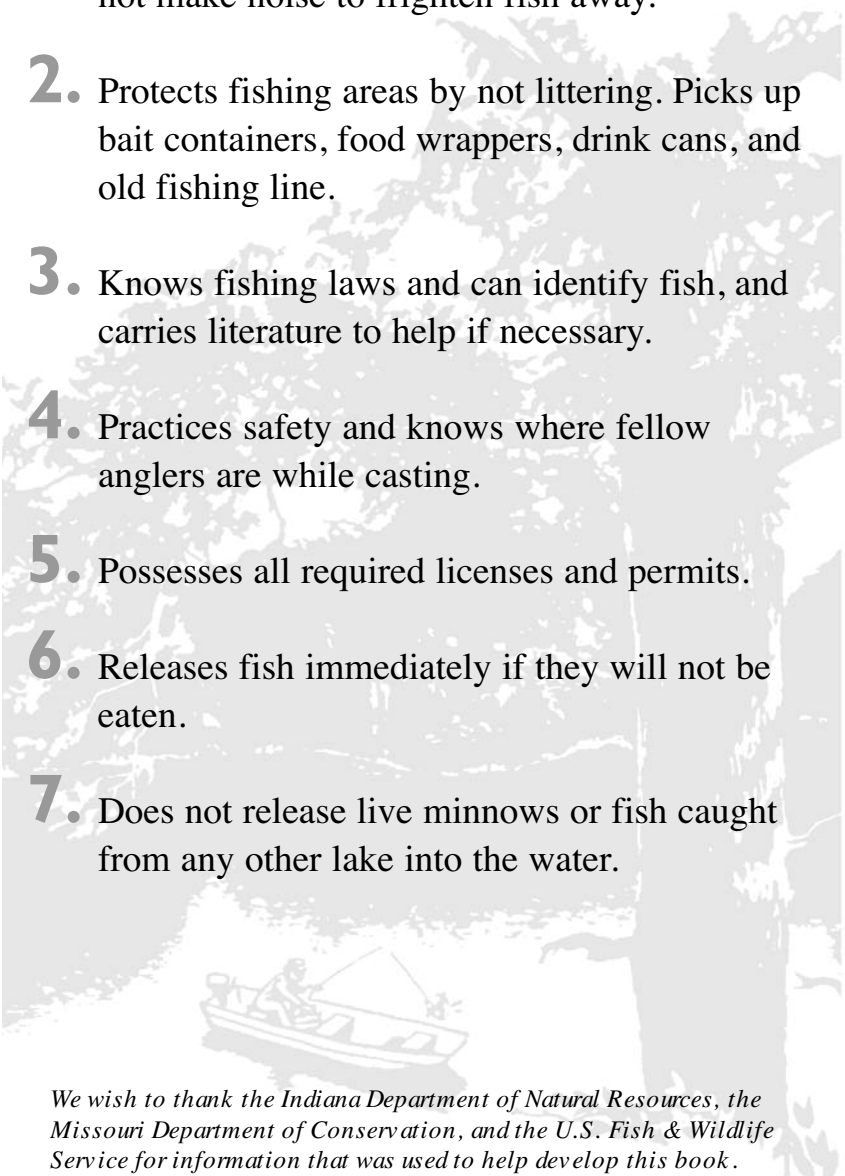
# Fishing - For Anglers of All Ages



Illinois  
Department of  
**Natural  
Resources**

# The Ethical Angler...

1. Respects other's privacy and territory. Does not crowd someone out of a fishing spot and does not make noise to frighten fish away.
2. Protects fishing areas by not littering. Picks up bait containers, food wrappers, drink cans, and old fishing line.
3. Knows fishing laws and can identify fish, and carries literature to help if necessary.
4. Practices safety and knows where fellow anglers are while casting.
5. Possesses all required licenses and permits.
6. Releases fish immediately if they will not be eaten.
7. Does not release live minnows or fish caught from any other lake into the water.



*We wish to thank the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, the Missouri Department of Conservation, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for information that was used to help develop this book.*

# Tips for Fishing with Kids

One does not have to be an expert angler to take kids fishing. However, kids have to catch fish to become interested in fishing. The following tips will help.

## **Avoid The Kid Stuff**

A quality 5½ foot spin cast (closed faced) rod and reel combo usually works better and is easier for kids to use than the short brightly colored fishing outfits that are available.

## **Small Hooks Are More Effective**

Avoid hooks larger than size 8 (hook sizes run backwards - size 8 is larger than size 10). Smaller hooks allow panfish to “inhale” the bait rather than nibble it off the hook. If you are getting bites and not catching fish, switch to a smaller hook. You can also catch big fish with small hooks.

## **Lighten Up Your Line**

Light line will do the job, preferable 8-pound test line or less.

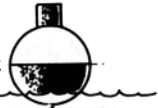
## **Get Rid OfThe Big Bobbers**

Bobbers (or floats) are used to suspend your bait in the water and to alert you when you have a bite. Small floats are recommended. The harder it is to pull the bobber under, the harder it will be to detect a bite and to hook a fish.

## **Sink It With Split Shot**

Sinkers help get your bait down to the fish. Squeeze small split shot sinkers onto the line with your fingers about 6-12 inches above the hook until your bobber nearly sinks from the weight. When there is very little resistance from the float the fish is more likely to take your bait. Many anglers use lead-free sinkers and split shot due to the toxicity of lead to birds.



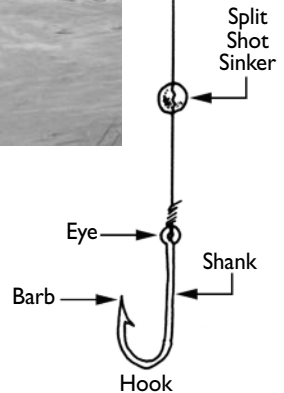
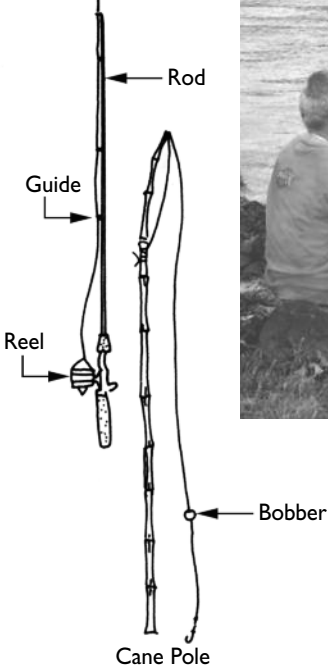


## Big Gobs Of Worms Won't Do

A bluegill has a very small mouth and there is no need to use a whole night crawler. Cut the bait the size of the lower part of your hook. Fish have to be able to get the hook and bait into its mouth. Live bait such as night crawlers, waxworms, or crickets work well.

## Where To Fish

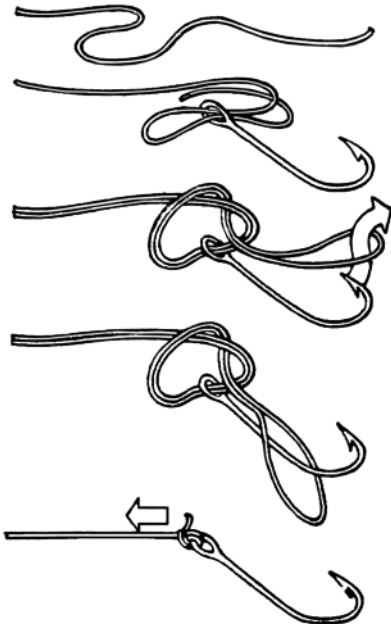
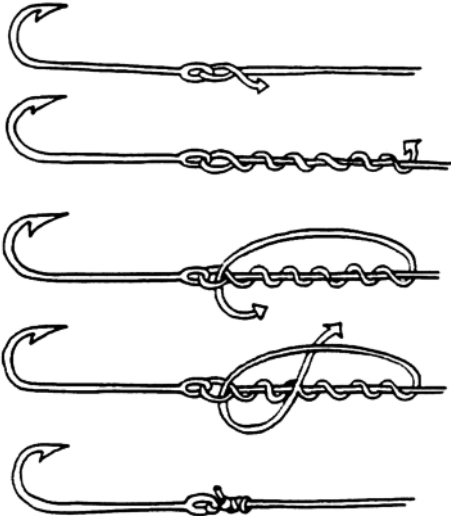
Don't cast way out to the middle. It is important to fish where the fish hide, such as areas near rocks along rip-rapped banks, trees or tree branches, and around or near aquatic vegetation or weed lines. Fish for catfish by using large pieces of nightcrawlers that are allowed to sink to the bottom using a tight line without a bobber. **If you don't have any success after just a few minutes, move at least a few feet to a different spot. Don't sit too long in one place if you are not getting bites - its boring.**



# Can I Tie An Improved Clinch Knot?

**Sure! Here's How. (Good for Monofilament Line)**

1. Put the end of the line through the eye of the hook and bring it back toward the line.
2. Make five twists around the line.
3. Take the end back toward the hook and push it through the first loop nearest the eye.
4. Bring the end back through the big loop.
5. Moisten the knot to add lubricant.
6. Holding the hook and the line, pull the knot tight until it looks like the knot shown.



## The PALOMAR KNOT

It's an easy one to tie.

**(Good for Super Braided Lines)**

1. Start with plenty of line.
2. Double the line and pass the end through the hook's eye.
3. Tie an overhand knot (like tying your shoe strings) but do not pull it tight yet.
4. Pass the hook through the loop.
5. Pull the loose end of line to tighten the knot. Trim the end leaving at least an 1/8" of line at the knot.



# What Do I Use For Bait?

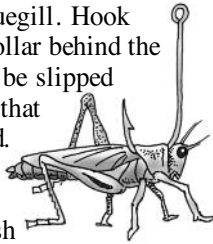
## How Do I Bait My Hook?

**WORMS** are a favorite fish bait. For catfish and other large fish, bring the hook through one end of

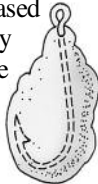


the worm until it covers the bottom part of the hook. Pull the hook down and through the worm again as shown in the picture. Worms can be purchased at the bait store or can be found under leaves, boards, and rocks in moist soil. Keep them in damp soil and in the shade. Refrigerate between fishing trips.

**CRICKETS** and **GRASSHOPPERS** are good bait for bluegill. Hook them through the collar behind the head. The hook can be slipped under this collar so that the point is exposed. If it is not important to keep the insect alive, push the hook through the its body.

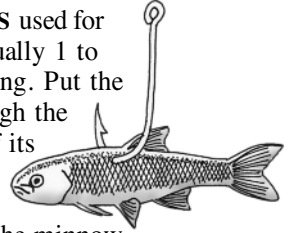


**DOUGHBALLS** are good bait for carp. This bait can be purchased or can be made with a variety of recipes which may include flour, bread, cornmeal, or wheaties, dampened with water, honey, and vanilla. Form in a tight ball and press onto a size # 4 or smaller hook.

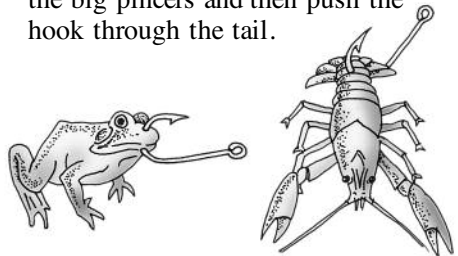


For sunfish and other small "bait stealers," hook small bits of worms like this with just the bottom part of the hook being covered.

**MINNOWS** used for bait are usually 1 to 3 inches long. Put the hook through the very top of its back just in front of the fin so the minnow can swim. Keep them in a minnow bucket in the shade and change water in the bucket occasionally to keep them alive.



Live **CRAWDADS** are good bass bait. Crawdads can be bought at the bait store and are also found under rocks in the water. Remove the big pincers and then push the hook through the tail.



Hook small **FROGS**, which can be found along the shore, through both lips or a leg.



# Bait Hook Sizes

## What Hook Do I Use?

HOOK NUMBERS	HOOK LENGTHS IN INCHES	TROUT	NORTHERN PIKE	MUSKELLUNGE	CHANNEL CATFISH	BULLHEAD	SMALLMOUTH BASS	LARGEMOUTH BASS	BLUEGILL	CRAPPIE	YELLOW PERCH	WALLEYE	SUCKER	CARP	SALTWATER FISH	
		13/0	4													
12/0	3-3/4															
11/0	3-1/2															
10/0	3-1/4															
9/0	3															
8/0	2-3/4															
7/0	2-1/2															
6/0	2-1/4															
5/0	2															
4/0	1-7/8															
3/0	1-3/4															
2/0	1-5/8															
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1	1-3/8															
2	1-1/4															
4	1-1/8															
6	15/16															
8	13/16															
10	11/16															
12	9/16															
16	7/16															
18	11/16															
20	9/32															
	7/32															
	5/32															

Hook Sizes Are Determined Mainly by the Width of the Bend

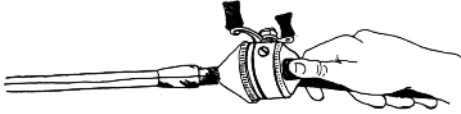
Sizes Recommended for Different Species of Fish

# Let's Go Fishing!

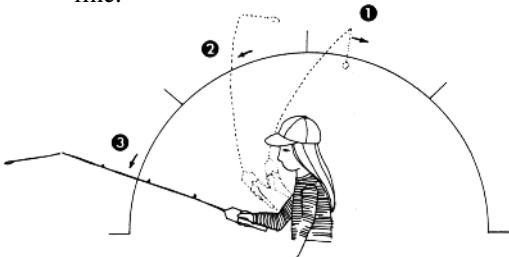
## What To Do.

1. Your line is ready and your hook is baited. Before casting, look above and behind you. Make sure no one is there. Check for trees and bushes. Make sure your hook isn't caught on anything and the line isn't wrapped around the rod.

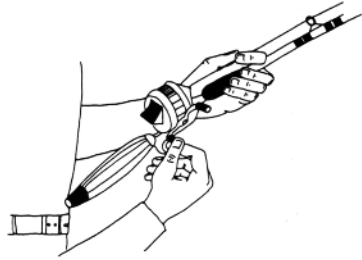
2. Press and hold the reel's release button.



3. Using your forearm, gently bring the rod straight up over your shoulder or at a slight angle to one side. Gently sweep the rod forward and take your thumb off the button when you want to release the line.



4. Place your free hand in front of the reel with three fingers below the rod. Your thumb and forefinger will be on top.



5. Turn the reel handle one turn until it clicks, and then reel to tighten your line until the float moves slightly. Always keep the slack out of your line and watch your float. When retrieving the line, run it through your thumb and first finger to keep it tight inside the reel. When the fish bites, the float may rise lightly, turn on its side, move laterally along the surface or go under water. When this happens, you may have a fish.



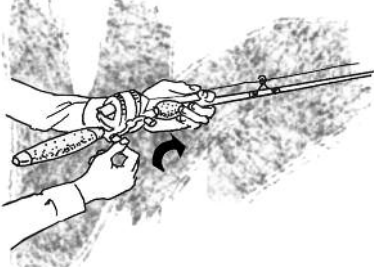


# I Have A Fish!

## What Do I Do Now?



**SET THE HOOK!** This refers to the method of yanking up your fishing pole to jerk the hook into the fish's mouth. In most cases, one moderate snap of the rod is all that is needed.

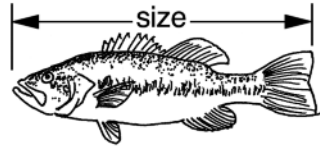


Keep your line tight and your rod tip up. Moderately reel in the fish.

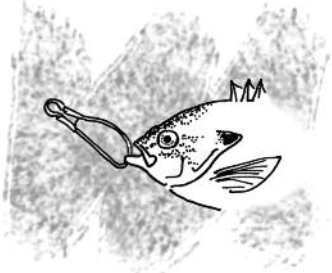


To remove a sunfish from the hook, take hold of the line or hook with one hand and "pet" down the

top fin with your hand by sliding your hand over the top fin before gripping the fish with that hand.



Is the fish large enough to keep? Will it be used for food? If not, carefully release the fish into the water immediately. Handle the fish as little as possible. A fish that you catch and release carefully can be caught again later when it is bigger.

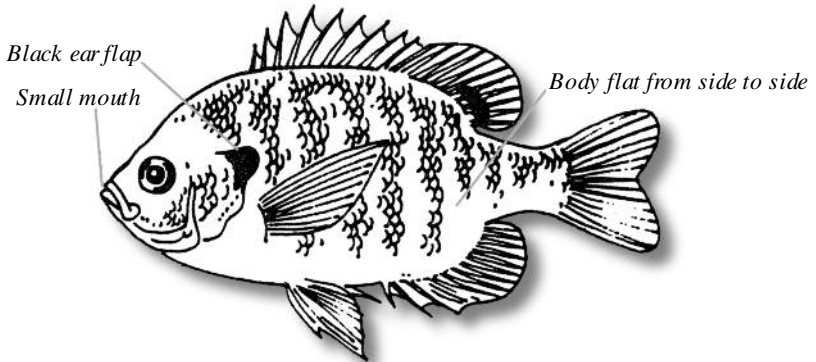


You can keep your fish alive by pushing a stringer through the bottom lip and then let the fish swim in the water. Tie the other end of the stringer to a branch or stick it into the ground. Do not run a stringer through the mouth and out the gill opening, it may injure the gills and kill the fish. You can also use a wire fish basket to keep your fish alive.

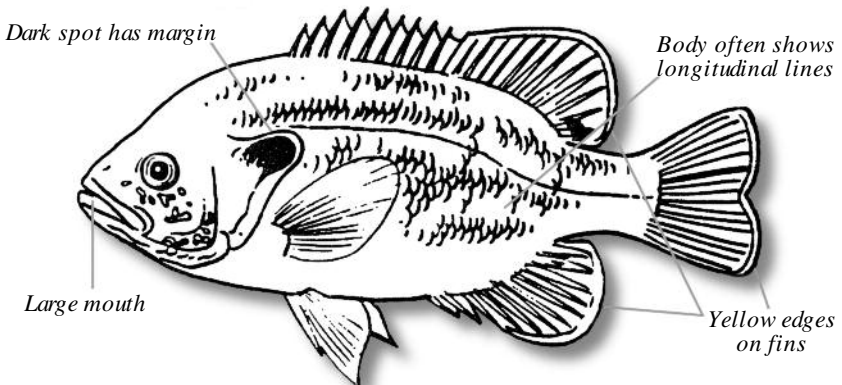
# Sunfish Family

Most members of the sunfish family do not grow much larger than 10 inches but they fight hard and are fun to catch. There are several species of sunfish, each with a slightly different body characteristic. They are moderately easy to catch. Typical baits used are worms, crickets, waxworms, and whatever else one might like to try. Small hooks and small bobbers are recommended. Sunfish are usually caught in a place that offers protection from predators such as rocks in a rip rapped area, trees and brush in the water, and weed beds close to the shore. They are usually biting and can even be caught through the ice.

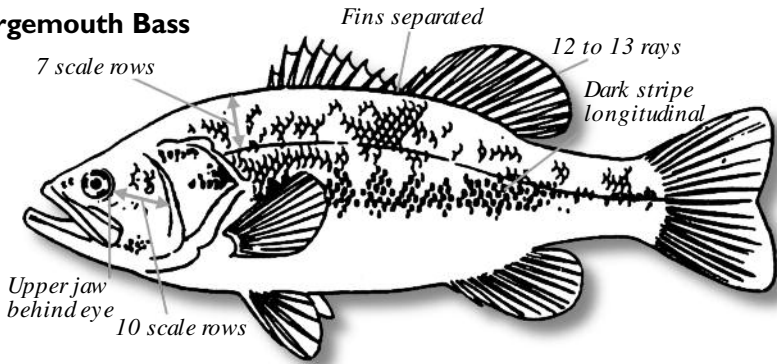
## Bluegill (Illinois State Fish)



## Green Sunfish

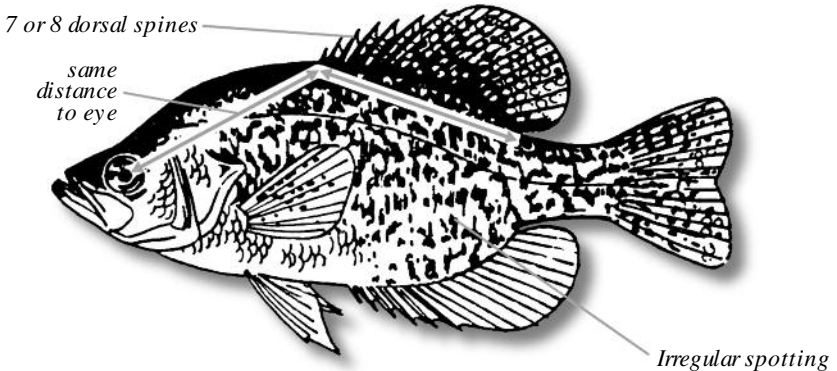


## Largemouth Bass



The largemouth bass, slough bass, or black bass prefers warm and sluggish waters and thrives in vegetated mud-bottom lakes and ponds. Largemouths are easily recognized by their large mouth, upper jaw which extends back behind the eye, and dark stripes or blotches which extend the full length of the body. An adult largemouth is not finicky about its diet and will feed on small fish, frogs, crayfish, worms, tadpoles, insects, etc. Early morning or late evening is the best time to fish for this fish. The largemouth bass is the largest member of the sunfish family.

## Black Crappie

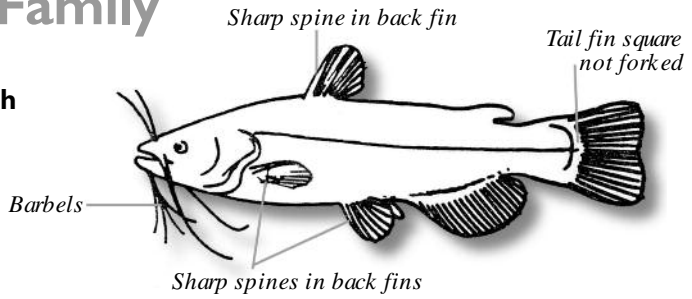


Two species of crappie (black and white) occur in most large lakes, rivers, and many inland lakes in Illinois. Color patterns vary from dark splotches arranged in vertical bands on the white crappie to irregular dark splotches on the black crappie. Still fishing is the most common method used to fish for crappie. A small hook and lively minnow with a bobber and split shot weight or a feathered or plastic jig moved up and down are good ways to catch crappie.

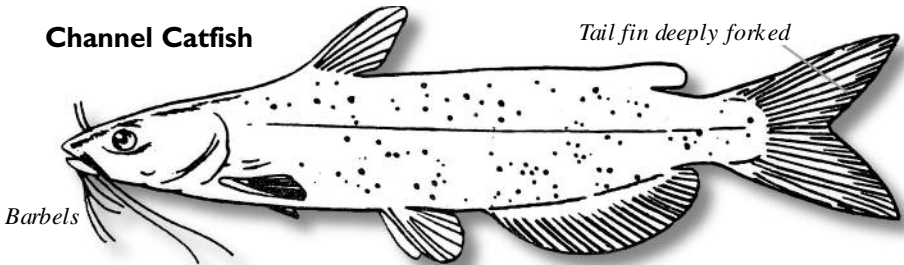


# Catfish Family

## Bullhead Catfish



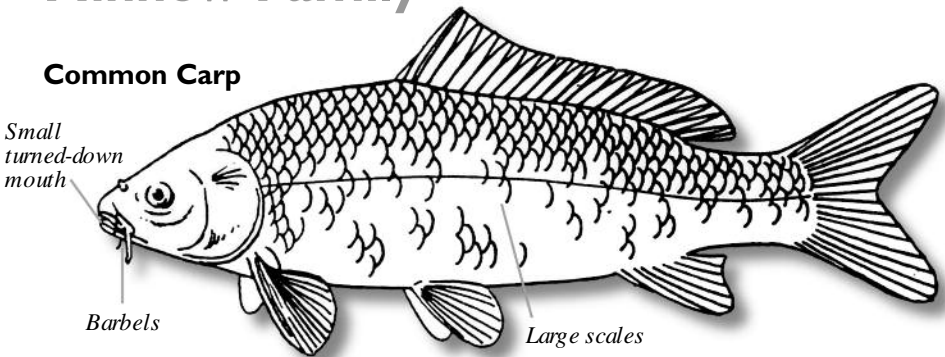
## Channel Catfish



Catfish do not have scales, but do have barbels or “whiskers” which are harmless. They use barbels and their good sense of smell to find food. You should handle catfish carefully because of the sharp spines in their fins. Keep your bait close to the bottom where catfish usually feed.

# Minnow Family

## Common Carp



Common carp grow to a large size and are strong fighters. They usually feed on the bottom of rivers and lakes. Their small mouths require a small hook. They like to sniff the bait and sample it before they suck it into their mouths. Give them lots of time to take the bait. Carp are an important commercial fish in Illinois because they are delicious when prepared properly.



# Make Your Fishing Trip Fun

Fishing can be a highly technical hobby. The choice in rods, reels, bait, lures, and lines can be mind boggling. Remember, when on family outings, **keep it simple** and keep it light. This will keep you from fighting equipment and allow more time for fishing.

**COMBINING ACTIVITIES** can also make family outings more enjoyable. For instance, try making your own fishing rods from willow branches and a length of fishing line. You can also find your own bait under rocks or in the weeds around lakes and streams. Make catching a fish a learning experience and an adventure.

**LIGHT LINES, SMALL HOOKS, AND SMALL FLOATS** can help you put some excitement on the end of the line fast. Kids tire quickly and often give up while waiting for lunker fish to bite. Most kids would rather pull in 25 bluegill than wait for one trophy catch.

**To children, each fish they catch is a trophy.**



## Rod and Reel Loaner Sites

If you need additional fishing equipment for your outing, you can borrow fishing poles and get appropriate hooks and associated tackle for free at numerous sites around the state. See [www.ifishillinois.org](http://www.ifishillinois.org) for loaner sites and fishing information.



# Catching Fish to Eat

It is important to keep fish alive or place them on ice immediately after being caught to preserve their quality. To keep them alive, hold them on a stringer in the water, in a fish basket in the water, or in a live well. There are several ways to clean a fish.

## **Dressed , or Pan-Dressed**

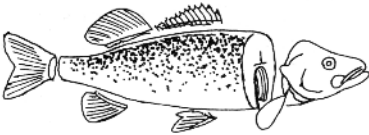
Scaled, drawn with head, tail, and fins removed

## **Filleted**

Sides of fish are cut lengthwise along backbone

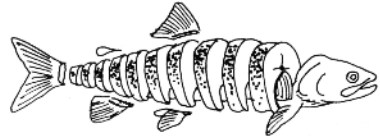
## **Steaked**

Cross-sectional slices cut from larger fish



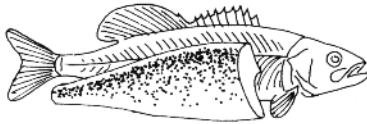
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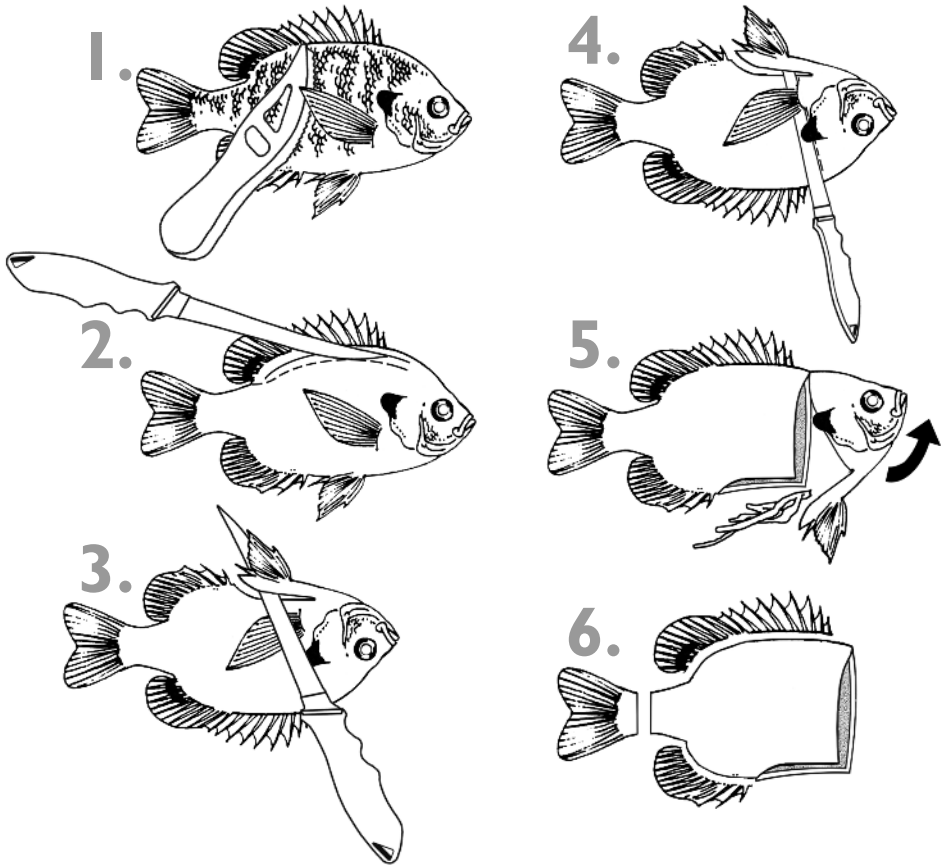


# Cleaning Fish

There are several ways to prepare fish for eating. Small fish may be filleted or cleaned, but larger fish are usually filleted or steaked. For safety and humane purposes, make sure knives are sharp and fish are no longer alive before processing.

## Pan Dressing

To pan dress a fish, remove all of its scales with a scale remover or a spoon, starting at the tail and working forward. Also scrape the skin with a knife to remove any slime which may give a strong fishy taste. Open the body cavity, beginning with a cut at the anus and extend to the gills. Remove the entrails, being careful not to open them and then cut off the head. Remove the dark “blood line” that lies inside along the backbone with your thumbnail or a spoon, and remove the fins and tail.



## Filleting Your Fish

Using a sharp knife, lay the fish on its side and begin to fillet by cutting through its side just behind the gills down to the backbone.

Turn the blade and continue the cut along the entire length of the fish just above the backbone, which will include cutting through the ribs.

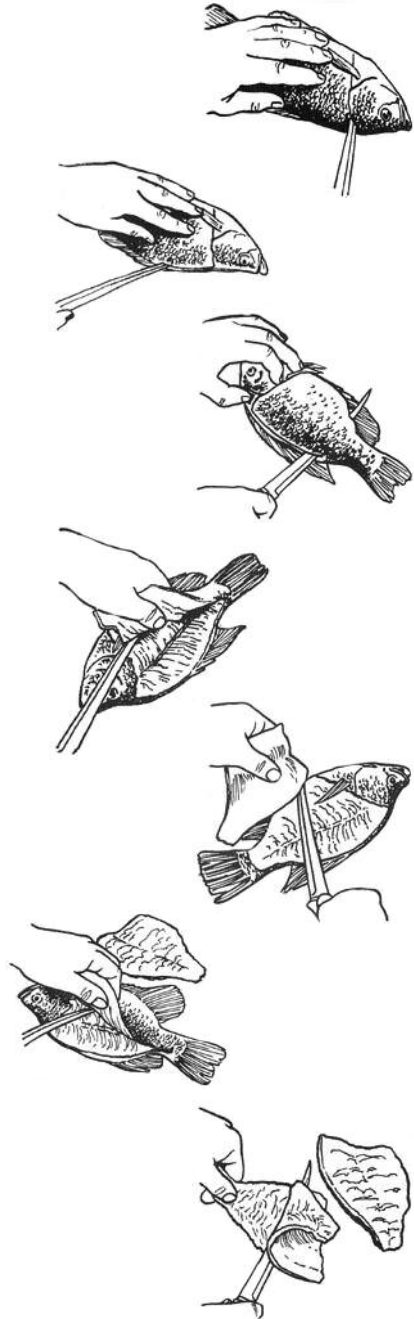
Flip the fillet over and cut into the flesh down to the skin. Hold the knife steady and work it in a sawing motion as you separate the flesh from the skin. Once the fillet is removed from the skin, cut the ribs away from the flesh.

Repeat this same procedure on the other side of the fish.

If you don't like cutting through the ribs, cut over the ribs when cutting along the side. It takes a little longer but your knife will not dull as quickly.

Fillets of some fish such as white bass will be more tasty if the dark and red flesh is cut away.

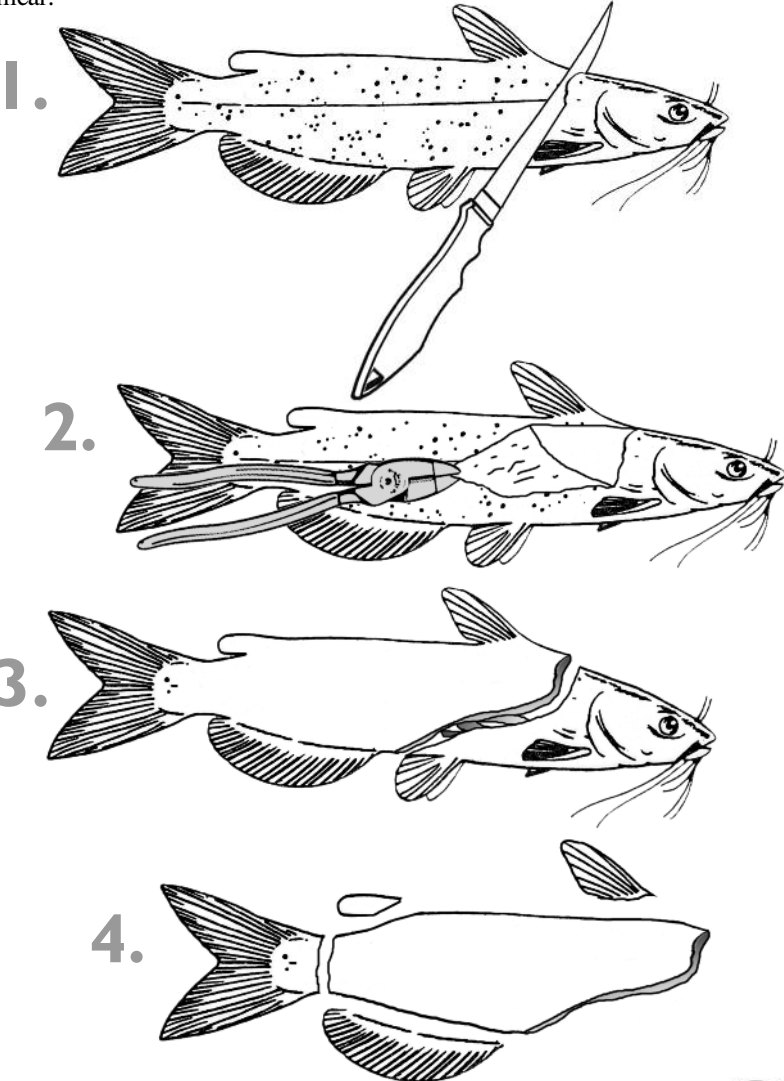
Wash and freeze your fillets as soon as possible. Fish frozen in water will remain in good condition longer.





## Catfish Cleaning

When cleaning a catfish you must first remove the skin. Cut through the skin around the fish behind the head. With a pliers or skinning tool, pull the skin off toward the tail. Next you can cut into the body cavity from the anus to the throat, then cut through the backbone behind the head. Break the head downwards from the body and remove the head and entrails at the same time. Cut along the dorsal fin and pull it off with a pliers, then pull or cut off the other fins and cut off the tail. Catfish may also be filleted or steaked after Step 2 (skinning) if desired. You should trim off the fat ( yellow tissue ) for a more tasty and healthy meal.

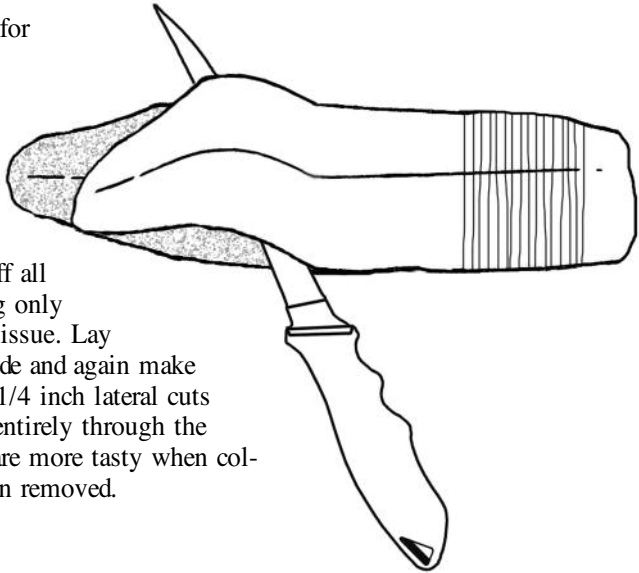


## “Rough Fish” Cleaning

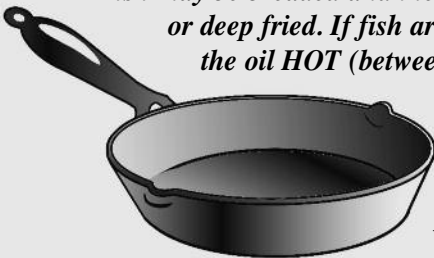
To clean carp, buffalo, suckers, or other “rough” fish, several methods can be used. The first method first requires removing scales (fleeing), then filleting the fish. Do not remove the skin. These fish have many small “Y” bones in the flesh. The fillet must be “scored” to cut these bones into small pieces.

To score the fillet, lay it skin side down and make numerous lateral cuts through the flesh approximately 1/8 to 1/4 inch wide down to the skin. This will cut the bones into small pieces to soften when cooked. The skin will hold the “scored” pieces together during cooking or frying. “Scoring” works best for small to medium fish, as “Y” bones in large fish may remain noticeable while eating.

A second method for cleaning “rough fish” requires the regular filleting of the fish along with removing the skin. One should then cut off all dark meat, leaving only the light-colored tissue. Lay the fillet on its side and again make numerous 1/8 to 1/4 inch lateral cuts (scoring) almost entirely through the flesh. Most fish are more tasty when colored flesh has been removed.



*Fish may be breaded and then baked, broiled, grilled, pan fried, or deep fried. If fish are deep fried, it is important to have the oil HOT (between 350 and 400 degrees), and check it with a thermometer.*



*If scored fish are fried in a skillet, place the scored side down when initially placing it in the pan.*



# Cooking Your Catch

The basic fish cooking rules are easy to follow, even though each type of fish has individual flavor, texture, and appearance.

A variety of methods can be used to prepare fish for eating. These include broiling, baking, steaming, and frying. If lean fish such as bass and other members of the sunfish family are broiled, they should be basted with seasoning (garlic, lemon, etc.) in melted butter to prevent drying. Fish with high fat content (trout, salmon) don't have to be basted as much.

Avoid overcooking. The fish should be moist and tender. Overcooking causes it to become dry and chewy. Fish is done when the flesh is opaque and can be easily flaked with a fork.

Don't over handle fish during cooking and serving. Cooked fish is delicate and will flake apart easily. Turn only once during cooking and transfer carefully to a platter to serve.

## **BROILING**

Sprinkle serving-sized portions of fish with seasoning. Place on a preheated greased broiler pan, skin side up if skin has not been removed. Baste with melted butter. Broil about 2 inches from heat for 5 to 8 minutes, or until it flakes easily with a fork.

## **BAKING**

Rub seasoning on both sides of the fish and place it in a greased baking pan. Brush with melted butter (lay slices of bacon over top if desired). Bake in a moderately heated oven until the fish flakes easily with a fork. If fish seems dry while baking, baste more frequently.

## **STEAMING**

Season both sides of the fish. Place fish in a well-greased steamer pan and cook over boiling water till it flakes easily with a fork. Serve with lemon or a sauce.

## **DEEP OIL FRYING**

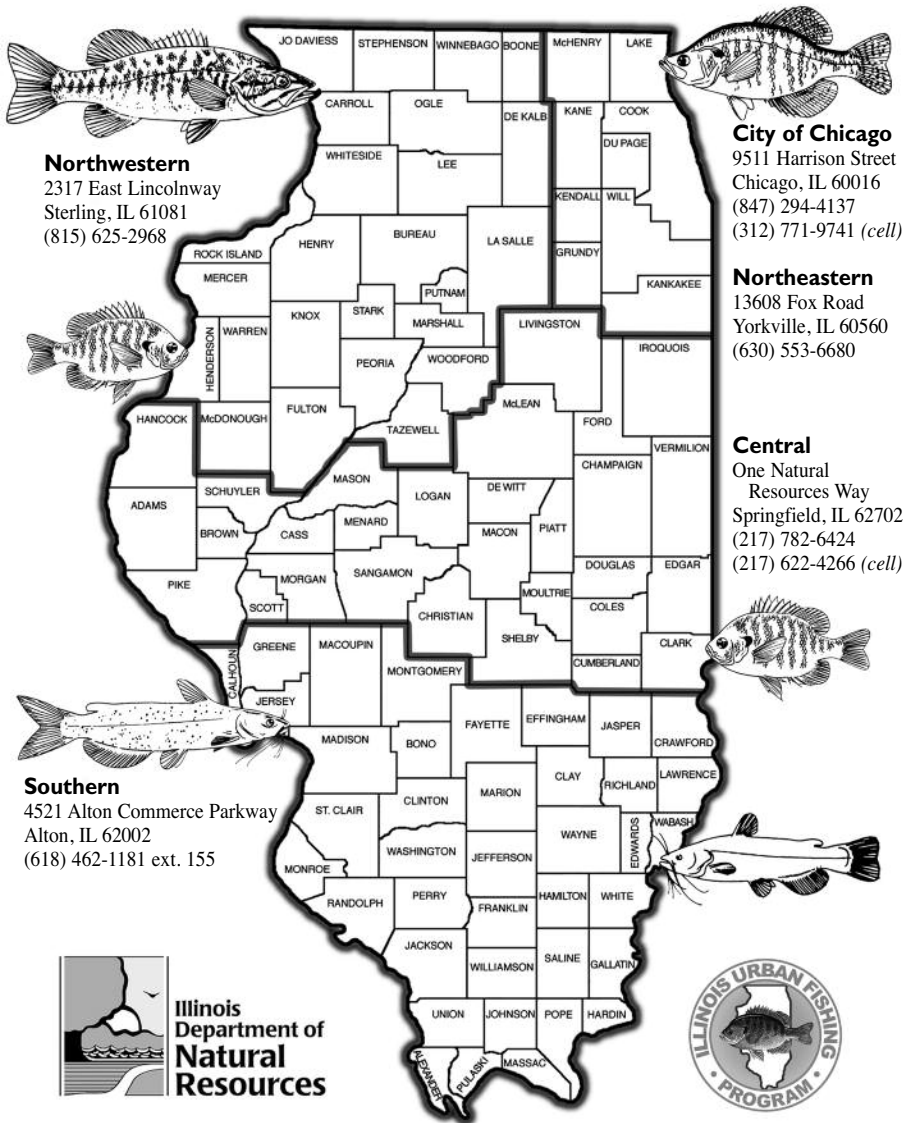
Cut fish into smaller equal-sized pieces. Dip it in a mixture of a few tablespoons of milk to one egg. Drain and then shake the fish in a zip-locked bag containing cracker crumbs, cornmeal, flour, prepared fish seasoning, etc. Cook in deep oil (350-400 degrees - checked with thermometer) until brown or the pieces float to the surface. Place on absorbent towels and blot dry. Serve with lemon or sauce.

## **PAN FRYING**

Prepare the fish as described for deep oil frying and place pieces in a skillet containing 1/4 inch of hot oil. Fry on the first side until the fish is browned and then flip to repeat on the other side. If necessary, blot dry with towels.

# ILLINOIS URBAN FISHING PROGRAM

## Urban Fishing Information



Equal opportunity to participate in programs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and those funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies is available to all individuals regardless of race, sex, national origin, disability, age, religion or other non-merit factors. If you believe you have been discriminated against, contact the funding source's civil rights office and/or the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, DNR, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702-1271; (217) 785-0067; TTY (217) 782-9175.

This information may be provided in an alternative format if required. Contact the DNR Clearinghouse at 217/782-7498 for assistance.

