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# CATCH FISHING!

5th Ed. 2014

**Your Basic  
“How To”  
Guide To  
Fishing In  
Canada**

**by  
Rick  
Amsbury**



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## Your Basic “How To” Guide To Fishing In Canada

by

**Rick Amsbury**

**For the Canadian National  
Sportfishing Foundation**



RICK AMSBURY LIVED HIS LIFE as a friendly ambassador for fishing, hunting and conservation of fish and wildlife. He never missed a chance to take folks fishing - people of any age, background or ability. His great sense of humor and remarkable ability to make friends from North Bay to North Carolina made him a natural at teaching people to fish. Rick was an effective advocate for the environmentally sustainable and responsible use

of natural resources and he made it a point to explain that anglers and hunters do more for fish and wildlife conservation than all other groups combined. He believed that fishing opened a unique 'door' within each of us, leading to a personal appreciation for the outdoors and to improved mental and physical health. This book was one way Rick shared his special talents with anyone who wants to learn to fish.

The Canadian National Sportfishing Foundation is grateful to acknowledge the collective support of the following agencies in the publishing of this book:

**Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association**

**Fisheries and Oceans Canada**

**British Columbia Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection**

**Alberta, Department of Sustainable Resource Development**

**Saskatchewan Environment & Resource Management**

**Manitoba Conservation**

**Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources**

**Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec**

**New Brunswick Department of Natural Resources and Energy**

**Nova Scotia Agriculture and Fisheries**

**Prince Edward Island Fisheries, Aquaculture & Environment**

**Newfoundland Department of Forestry and Agrifood**

**Yukon Department of Renewable Resources**

*Publisher:* **Canadian National Sportfishing Foundation**

*Editor:* **Gary Ball**

*Assistant Editor:* **Shirley Maloney**

*Illustrations:* **Christopher Morton**

*Cartoons:* **Robert Morton,**

*Graphic Design:* **big sky design**

ISBN 0-9730953-0-X

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Printed in Canada

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Volume discount sales may be negotiated with qualifying businesses or organizations wishing to raise funds for fisheries related conservation projects or education programs.

Proceeds from the sale of this book are used by the Canadian National Sportfishing Foundation to promote National Fishing Week and other fisheries education and conservation projects.

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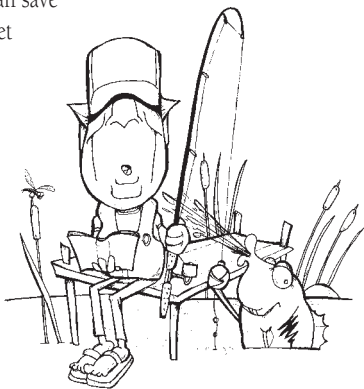


# PART 1: GETTING STARTED

## Where Do I Start?

YOU ALREADY HAVE. By picking up this handy tackle box guide you are on your way to years of safe and enjoyable fishing adventures. Starting here, with the basic information, can save you a lot of money and help you get the most out of your days on the water.

For the first few months of fishing, tuck this little book into your tackle box or a handy pocket. Between its covers, you'll find all sorts of help and advice. There are all sorts of handy tips and just about everything you need to know about fishing...from where to go, to cooking up your catch. Information is power and the information here is what you'll need to know to catch fish in your area.



## STEP 1: Steal Ideas

FIND SOMEONE NEARBY, maybe a friend or relative who fishes a lot. That shouldn't be hard. One out of every four Canadians goes fishing already. Once you've found somebody to be a "coach", convince them to

take you along. Begging, pleading, and groveling are all okay. You're an angler now and there are no rules against learning how to fish. Stealing fishing ideas is perfectly legal ...and expected.



Watch your new fishing coach closely. Make note of everything he or she does to catch fish. Once you've learned all you can from one fishing buddy, move along to another one. The more good teachers you get to fish with, the faster you'll improve your own fishing.

The way you pay back your fishing coaches is to become one yourself. Just pass along what you've learned to eager new fishermen. Pretend you don't see them taking notes.



**FISH FACT:** A drop of ten degrees or more in air temperature will cause many fish to feed far less actively even though the water temperature might only change a degree or two.

## **STEP 2: Find a Tackle Dealer**

GET TO KNOW your local fishing tackle retailer. Tackle sellers have all kinds of great information about local fishing. They want to keep you happy and coming back to their stores. If you simply tell them you're hooked on fishing, they'll go out of their way to help.

Tackle retailers can also help you with information on matching tackle



to the kind of fish you can catch in your area and help you stay within your fishing budget.

Often the people who work selling fishing tackle love to fish themselves. And they know all kinds of anglers in the area and hear the latest fishing stories. They can pass along information on what's biting, where it's biting and what baits are "hot".

Tackle shops can also put you in touch with the best anglers in the area if you're looking for new ideas to borrow... or steal. If there's a fishing club in town, the tackle guy can likely put you in touch with someone who can help you join. Most clubs hold regular meetings with guest speakers who are experts on various fishing topics. Many clubs also hold group fishing trips that offer up some great company, a lot of laughs, and sometimes, they catch fish too.

### **STEP 3: Read the Regulations**

EACH PROVINCE AND TERRITORY in Canada has its own booklet or summary of fishing regulations. These are usually free for the asking and can be found at tackle shops, fishing-related businesses, like marinas, and in the offices of the government agency responsible for fish and wildlife in your area.

The "regs" have all sorts of information you need like: open and closed seasons for various fish, catch and possession limits for fish, special rules for different lakes and rivers, what fish can be found in which waters and any rules that apply to transporting fish you've caught.



It's up to the angler to keep track of the regulations, so keep a copy handy every time you go fishing. Make sure you know the rules for the area you're fishing in. These regulations are in place to protect fish populations and ensure that you will always have a chance to go fishing.

## **STEP 4: Get the Learning Yearning**

AS A DEDICATED CANADIAN ANGLER you have a moral obligation to learn as much about your new pastime as possible. You are expected to subscribe to as many fishing magazines as you can afford. You must also agree to watch as many fishing TV shows and videos as possible. In what spare time you have left, it is expected that you check out every fishing site on the internet.

It's true. The more you learn, the more fish you catch and the bigger those fish will be. For now, check out the handy list of magazines, shows and web sites on page 48.



**TIP:** There's no bad time to go fishing. But, to improve your chances of catching fish, pay attention to the lunar tables found in most fishing magazines and calendars. Fishing in peak hours of the best fishing days can pay dividends.



**FISH FACT:** Fish scales are a common ingredient in lipstick.

## PART 2: THE FISHING OUTFIT

### Welcome to The Outfit

IF YOU TRY HARD ENOUGH, you can catch fish with a piece of string tied to a stick, a hook and a bit of bait. But that's doing it the tough way. Adding a fishing rod and reel makes it a lot easier and lets you put your bait in more productive hideouts for fish. Besides, it's a lot more fun.

The basic fishing outfit is really four pieces: a rod, a reel, line and a lure or bait. For best performance, all of these four parts should be matched for weight. And they should match the size of the fish you're hoping to catch.



**FISH FACT:** As recently as 1985, a Canadian company used the tanned skins of the common carp to make women's clothing.

### Match your catch

The easiest place to start to put together a fishing outfit is to decide what size of fish you will be fishing for most often. This will determine the size and strength of the equipment you select.

No matter where you live in Canada, you will be able to fish for a good variety of species. You could be in search of a whopping 10-inch panfish or a sturgeon that weighs just a little bit less than a dump truck.

For our purposes, let's match our equipment to fish that weigh less than 20 pounds. This covers the majority of Canada's game fish and once you've mastered the basics in this book, you can go in search of bigger fish by simply moving up to a larger, stronger outfit.

## Picking a Reel

THERE ARE LOTS OF DIFFERENT STYLES of fishing, each with its own special lines, rods and reels. Some of the more common are: spincasting, spinning, baitcasting, fly-fishing, downrigging and trolling. But let's make it easy and get started by looking at just two of the simplest and most effective fishing styles: spincasting and spinning. Once you're comfortable with these, you can move on to other styles whenever you want.

### The spincasting reel

Spincasters are the easiest reels to learn to use and work very well for fish weighing up to about 10 pounds. They prevent line tangles and are ideal for people with smaller hands. They are inexpensive and easy to cast with. Kids love them and learn to use them quickly. Many adults start out fishing with a spincaster and don't see any reason to change.

You'll see from the diagram that the spincasting reel is mounted on top of the rod and should remain there for both casting and reeling in line. The thumb button on the back of the reel is designed to release line



A spincasting reel

when you want to cast. Check out the “How to Cast” section for step-by-step instructions.

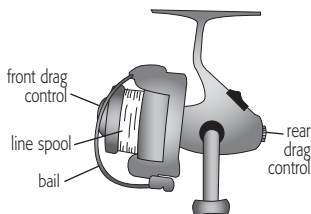
Perhaps the most important part of the reel is the “drag control” wheel which controls the amount of tension on the line when a fish is hooked. If the control reel is set too tightly, a big fish could break your line and your heart. Too little tension can result in slack line between the fish and the reel, letting the fish easily shake or “spit” the hook.



## The spinning reel

More spinning reels are sold in Canada than all other types of reels combined. The reason for this is versatility. Spinning reels come in a variety of sizes and can be fished with many different line strengths. They let you make long, accurate casts and are usually durable, often giving five to ten years of reliable service with little maintenance.

From the diagram, you'll notice several differences between spinning



A spinning reel

and spincasting reels. The spinning reel is mounted below the rod for both casting and retrieving. That big metal arm in front of the reel is called the bail. It wraps the line evenly around the spool when you turn the reel handle to retrieve. When casting,

the bail is folded in a locked position (open) to allow the line to be pulled off easily by the weight of the lure or bait being cast.

Spinning reels may have the drag control located at the front (front drag) or at the back of the reel (rear drag). These knobs are turned clockwise to increase the tension on the line. Choosing between front and rear drag is pretty much a matter of deciding which you prefer. Both perform well.



**TIP:** To set your drag, hold the rod firmly in one hand and, with the drag engaged, pull line out of the reel with your other hand. Try to estimate the weight of the fish you will be after and set the drag control so that a heavier fish can pull some line off the reel smoothly.



**FISH FACT:** Many fish species feed aggressively just before a thunderstorm.

## Picking a Fishing Rod

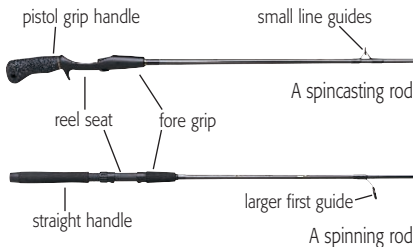
THERE ARE PROBABLY a million things you want to know about fishing rods, but you aren't going to get all the answers here. To get the information on materials, features and actions, go

and ask the guy at your local tackle store. He can explain and demonstrate the differences and explain how they might improve your fishing.

Our job here is to help you find a suitable rod to match the spinning or spincasting reel you have already chosen. Most important are the length of the rod and its action.

You will see from the diagram that the major difference between a spincast and spinning rod is the position of the reel seat. Spincast rods are designed so the reel sits on top of the rod while spinning rods hold the reel below the rod. Also, most spincast rods have a short "pistol" grip for smaller hands, rather than a long, straight handle.

Length and flexibility of a fishing rod will depend on the weight of the fish you're planning to catch most often. As a rule, for both spincasting and spinning, the rod should be about six inches longer than you are tall. The flexibility of a rod determines its "action". We're suggesting that you start with a medium action rod for two reasons: first, because it's the most



versatile of the actions and, second, because we're the experts here.

There are other features you should consider before buying your first fishing rod. The first is the number and construction of the line guides: the eyes along a rod, through which the line runs. Better spinning rods have between five and seven guides. In general, the more guides a rod has, the better it cushions the line when a fish is hooked and the better your chances of landing that trophy.

Now, consider the material in the eye of the guide, where the line touches the guide. If you plan to do a lot of fishing, look for hard ceramic eyes rather than the stainless steel found on many inexpensive rods. Friction caused over time by miles of line rubbing over the eyelets will eventually wear grooves in steel, grooves that can break your line and quite possibly your heart when you lose the lunker of a lifetime.

Finally, take a look at the material which makes up the handle of your fishing rod. In most cases, you will have a choice between cork and foam rubber. Both will do the job, but the cork usually lasts longer and can be cleaned up to look like new with a little fine sandpaper. On average, cork-handled rods are a little more expensive.

## **Decisions, decisions**

Which outfit is right for you?

Both spincast and spinning outfits are easy to learn to use with a little practice. You will find a good selection of decent quality spincast rods and reels for as little as \$50. A comparable quality spinning outfit will start at about \$60 to \$70. Both will do the job until you want to try a wider variety of fishing experiences.

Yeah, we know there are lots of outfits out there priced over \$200. And they're usually worth the extra money. But start out inexpensively and buy better quality gear when you know what features you need for specific kinds of fish or fishing. For now, try to save a little cash for lures and other neat stuff.



Now that you've selected a basic rod and reel, let's take a look at the next critical piece of your fishing outfit.

## What's My Line?

FISHING LINE IS MADE from a lot of different materials: steel, lead-core, braided fabrics and a whole bunch of stuff that's very hard to pronounce. To begin, we recommend you stick to a clear monofilament line found in all tackle stores at a reasonable cost. (About \$6 for 200 yards.)

Next, we match the strength of the line to the size of fish you are going after. Line strength is measured in "pound test." (Okay, it should be "pounds test", but you don't want to get funny looks from fellow anglers for using correct grammar. Remember, you are an angler now and certain rules do not apply to you.) This is an old term that refers to the breaking point of line when weight is added. For example, 10 lb test line will break when approximately 10 lbs of direct pressure is applied.

To make things easy, we will categorize line strength into light (2, 4 and 6 lb test), medium (8, 10, and 12 lb test), and heavy (16, 20 and 30 lb test or more). Most freshwater, and some saltwater fishing is done with light and medium lines. But don't be fooled. With the right equipment and a

little know-how you can land a 50 pound fish on 8 pound test line.

Here is a handy reference chart to help you match your line to the top 10 gamefish in Canada.

Fish species	Recommended line
Panfish	2 - 4 lb. test
Rainbow Trout	6 - 10 lb. test
Brook Trout	2 - 6 lb. test
Lake Trout < 10 lbs	6 - 10 lb. test
Smallmouth Bass	6 - 8 lb. test
Largemouth Bass	10 - 17 lb. test
Walleye	6 - 8 lb. test
Pike/Muskie	14 - 20 lb. test
Chinook Salmon	17 - 30 lb. test
Coho Salmon	10 - 14 lb. test



While this chart will serve as a good guideline, there are several factors other than the weight of the fish that determine the best line strength to select. For example, you should opt for heavier line if you are fishing in heavy weeds or around rock piles, logs or stumps. You should think about lighter line if you are fishing in very clear water, as the line is harder for the fish to see. Lighter lines get the nod when you are fishing very light lures or baits. It makes them easy to cast and can help improve the action of the lure.



**TIP:** While you're fishing, frequently check the first 3 to 6 feet of line above your lure for abrasions. Just run the line between your fingertips, looking for nicks or rough spots. If you detect damage, cut out the damaged section and retie the lure.

## Match your lure size to your outfit

A major factor in your selection of fishing rod, reel and line will be the size of baits and lures you plan to fish with. Marked on almost every fishing rod are the manufacturer's suggestions for the weight of lure and the strength of line that are recommended for that particular rod.

Obviously, you don't want to use 2 pound fishing line to battle an enraged muskie, or 20 lb test to try to cast a dainty little feathered lure.

Matching rod, reel, line and lure is a balancing act and every experienced angler has his or her ideas on what's best. But, for the time being, it's a good idea to stick to manufacturer's recommendations to make sure that all parts of your fishing outfit work in balance.

## Knots and Terminal Tackle

ANY FISHING ENCYCLOPEDIA will list thirty or so different knots every angler should know. Knot true. For now, all you need is one... the palomar knot. It is drop-dead easy to tie and is used to secure your lure or bait to your line. Unlike many other knots, it does not weaken your line where the line binds onto itself.



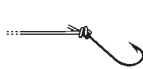
Double the line forming a long, narrow loop about 10 cm long; feed the end of the loop through the hole.



Tie an overhand knot, like starting to tie your shoelaces, but don't pull it tight.



Put the hook (lure) through the narrow end of the loop.



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.

### The palomar knot

## Terminal tackle

Sounds awful, doesn't it? This category of equipment is really the stuff that goes on the end of your line before you add the lure or bait. Always keep these items on board. They can make it easier to catch more fish.

### Snap swivels

The first item we'll talk about is called a snap-swivel. It is a device like a safety pin that makes it easy to change lures. But the big advantage to these swivels is that they prevent your line from twisting when the lure is being retrieved. Get a few.



A snap swivel





**TIP:** Polarized sunglasses are a must for anglers. They cut down sun glare and protect your eyes. Polarized sunglasses do a better job of cutting glare, and also allow you to see into the water. You can spot structure, estimate depths, and often see fish or minnows that would indicate a good place to fish.

## Sinkers

Many of the baits you will use for fishing are very light and don't have enough weight to cast easily, or to sink in the water. That's where weights, or sinkers, are used.

There are dozens of kinds and shapes of sinkers that can be used to get your lure down to the desired depth. The first ones you will use are likely to be split shot. Each split shot looks like a little round ball, with a slot in it. Your line passes through the slot and the little round ball is pinched shut gently, just enough to keep it on your line.

The first rule of using sinkers is to use only enough weight to get your bait or lure to sink as deeply as you want it to sink. You can add or subtract split shot pieces until you get it just right. A pair of fishing pliers is a handy tool to have in your tackle box for this, and other jobs.

Another popular sinker is the rubber-core. It has a small rubber insert inside the body that the line wraps around to provide the friction necessary to keep it from sliding up and down the line. These come in more sizes than split-shot and will not weaken your line.

Fish like to be at or near the edges of their territory, so many of the fish you will be trying to catch hang out on or near bottom, where they search for food. That's why you sometimes want to get your bait right down to the bottom with sinkers.



Sinkers

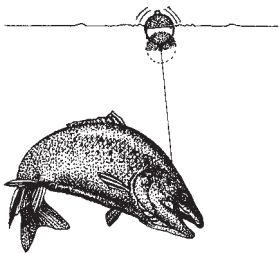




**TIP:** Save money by using only the amount of line necessary. Often, the reel spool has capacity for more line than you need for casting or trolling. Keep 30 or so yards of used line on the spool then tie your new line to it. Wind on the new line until it is about 1/8th of an inch from filling the spool.

## Floats and bobbers

There are other times when you might want to keep your bait closer to the top or a little bit farther off bottom while fishing. For this job, you'll need a simple float or bobber. There are all shapes and sizes of them, used by novices and pros alike, but the



simplest is a little red and white plastic ball that clips to your line above the hook and bait.

A wooden bobber



The bobber, which floats, can be adjusted to put your bait just as deep as you want

it. And when a fish begins to nibble at your bait, the bobber begins to bounce and wiggle to signal that you have a bite.



**TIP:** Keep your line in good shape. Avoid storing your line and outfit in very hot places or in direct sunlight for extended periods. Also, keep line out of contact with sunscreen lotions, gasoline and other solvents.



## Barbless hooks

Many anglers are moving away from traditional “barbed” hooks in favour of barbless hooks. It adds more of a challenge in landing a fish, as you must keep steady tension on the line or the fish could escape easily. But, the main reason these hooks are becoming popular is the fact that fish can be released much more quickly, increasing their chances of survival.

There is no need to buy special hooks. Simply pinch down the barbs on your hooks with your pliers. It only takes a second.

## Simple Guide to Buying Lures

WE’RE ALMOST AT THE LAKE. We just have to stop by the tackle shop and pick up a few sure-fire lures and baits. So what are your options, you ask? Well, to narrow the selection down from a thousand possibilities to a handful of items, let’s look at the basic choices: live bait or artificial lures.

Let’s think about why dogs bite.

Well, first of all, dogs bite to eat. So do fish. That’s why some baits are actually things fish eat, or things that look like fish food. Sometimes dogs bite because they’re surprised or scared. Fish do that too, snapping at something that goes flashing past in the water. These kinds of bites are called reaction bites. Dogs will bite because something smells or tastes like food. Fish have senses of smell, taste and hearing, and bites can be triggered by all of these senses.

So what baits do we use for fishing?

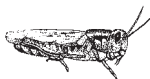
The earliest of baits were natural, things that fish actually ate, and they’re still great for catching



Minnow



Leech



Grasshopper



Worm



fish these days. Live bait consists of living food sources that live in, on, or near water, like smaller fish (minnows), crayfish, worms, grubs, insects, leeches and frogs. Fish are naturally attracted to them. The most common baits used by anglers are earthworms or dew worms. They are inexpensive and easy to thread onto your bare hook, or as a “teaser” on many other lures like jigs and spoons.



**TIP:** Certain areas of the country prohibit the use of some live bait, so check those fishing regulations we referred you to earlier to make sure the use of live bait is legal in your area.

Today, anglers fish with artificial baits or lures designed to fool fish into biting. They can be shaped like natural baits...plastic or wooden minnows and plastic worms and bugs. They can be designed to be the same shape or color as fish foods, like artificial flies tied in all sorts of colors of fur and feathers. Jigs are combinations of weights, fur, feather and plastic that are designed to sink instead of staying on the surface like flies. Or they can be designed to flash in the water, the way the scales of a baitfish do. Spoons and spinners flash this way. Some lures have blades or lips that are designed to splash and gurggle, aimed at attracting fish by sound.

Okay, you get the point. There are a gazillion different lures that catch fish, not just anglers. But, let's break these down into practical categories: surface lures, designed to be fished on, or near, the top of the water; shallow-water lures like minnow baits and spinners that are designed to be no more than 5 or 6 feet under the surface, and deepwater lures that are designed to sink deep and work best at, or near, bottom. To get started without going broke, we are going to select a few of each to round out your tackle box.



For our top-water lures we are going to pick a floating, minnow-shaped bait that we will twitch while retrieving slowly. Next, we'll take a floating "gurgler bait" that has a concave front and chugs noisily across the surface. These little devils drive fish crazy.



Top-water lures

Our shallow-water lure selection will be a spinner bait and another minnow shaped bait that is a bit heavier and has a small lip to give it a swimming action. These baits can be retrieved at a speed that usually keeps them less than 10 feet under the surface.



Shallow-water lures

Finally, our bottom baits. One of the most effective baits in this category is called a jig. It is simply a hook with a lead ball formed near the top of the shank. It comes in various sizes from 1/16 oz to 1/2 oz for freshwater, and at least double that for deeper, saltwater fishing. Jigs are usually tipped



Deep-water lures

with minnows, plastic tails, deer hair, or rubber skirts to appear more lively. Jigs are most often retrieved slowly across the bottom with a gentle lift-and-drop or hopping motion. Our second choice for a deepwater bait will be a weighted spoon that flashes to imitate the scale colours of moving minnows. These spoons come in a staggering array of colours and shapes.

There you have it. With your live bait and this handful of artificial lures, you have a good variety to match the size of the line and the rest of the outfit.



**TIP:** For sunny days, select bright coloured lures. On overcast days, you'll have better luck with darker colours.

## Your tackle box

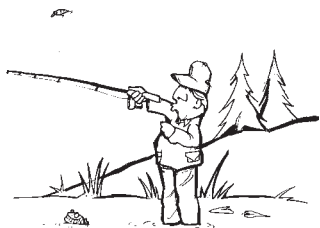
With rod and reel and hooks and line and terminal tackle and bobbers and lures and those fishing pliers that are so handy, you've got quite a load.



The answer to carrying your fishing equipment and keeping it neat is a tackle box. These nifty boxes, full of trays and compartments, are designed to keep all your fishing gear untangled and out in the open where you can see it easily. Your tackle retailer will likely start you off with a smaller box to handle the selection of tackle and lures you will need for fishing near where you live. As you do more and more fishing, you can add tackle boxes or move up to bigger boxes.



## PART 3: CAST AWAY!



LET'S GET TO some of the fun stuff, like casting: getting your bait out to a spot where you think fish are hiding.

Casting accurately is an important part of catching fish, but it's also a lot of fun and it only takes a little practice to get quite good. To start, tie a small weight to the end of your line. Tackle stores sell "casting plugs" for this purpose, but you can even raid your workshop for a small threaded nut or metal washer.



**TIP:** Here's a check-list of items you should never be without: needle-nose pliers for quickly removing hooks from fish, nail-clippers for cutting line, sharp fillet knife for cleaning fish, fishing hat with visor, polarized sunglasses to help you see into water, sunscreen and insect repellent. Oh yeah, and a camera.

Then, grab a small bucket to serve as a target and head out to your backyard or a nearby park. Set the target about forty paces away and try to cast the weight into the bucket. The trick to casting your plug to the place you want it to go is all in letting go of your line at the right point in your cast. With a spincasting reel, the line is released by depressing the casting button, then lifting your thumb off the button at just the right point in your cast. With a spinning reel, you open the bail on the reel first, and hook the line over your index finger. At the right point in your cast, you

simply straighten out your finger. The line slides easily off the finger. (Avoid the tendency to trap the line between your finger and the rod. Just let the line lay across your finger; the tension from your lure will keep it there.)

First, stand squarely facing your target, then release enough line so that your “lure” hangs no more than 12 inches off the tip of your rod. Keeping the elbow of your casting arm at your side, bring the rod tip straight over your shoulder, not off to the side.

Now, imagine that you are standing in front of a clock, as the picture shows. When the rod tip is at about the 2:00 o'clock position, smoothly but quickly snap your hand forward to about the 11:00 o'clock position and release the line from your finger or release the button on your spin-cast reel. Let your arm follow through to about the 9:00 o'clock position. With a little practice, you will learn exactly when to release your line and how fast your rod has to be moving for your lure to hit near your target. Obviously, the faster your arm is moving when you release the line, the farther your lure will fly through the air. But when you are fishing, you can cast too far, making it very difficult to set the hook when a fish bites. Shoot for accuracy first. The distance will come later. Casting is lots of fun and all it takes is practice. The more you practice, the closer you can land your lure to your target and that's one of the secrets of catching more fish.

Whether practicing or casting with other people nearby, be very careful that you can cast safely, without snagging anyone with your hook or lure.



Casting technique



## PART 4: FISHING FROM A BOAT

CANADA HAS MORE PLACES to fish than anywhere else in the world, so you don't really need a boat to go fishing. But boats can make it easier to catch more fish. Whether you use a boat, canoe or kayak, you can check out shorelines, shoals and other productive fishing areas. Boating can also add enjoyment to your day by letting you see all the amazing sights Mother Nature has to offer.

There are really three methods of using a watercraft to catch fish. You can troll, drift with the wind, or still-fish.



**TIP:** When fishing in the wind, keep your baits downwind from you in a straight line. Also, cast with the wind, not into it, wherever possible. Otherwise, the wind will cause your line to bow, making it almost impossible to feel a strike.



**FISHING FACT:** The stickleback minnow will migrate several hundred yards from one waterbody to the next, wiggling through wet grass.



## Trolling

TROLLING IS EASY. You just drag your lure behind the boat. It can be a very effective way to locate and catch fish. The trick is to know where on the lake or in the river to troll. Many kinds of fish are caught close to shore where the bottom drops off to greater depths. This is where feeding fish tend to hang out because it is where their food is. You know; it's a food chain thing. Other good trolling spots include gravel bars, rock piles, shoals and weed-bed edges or underwater ledges. In many cases, you can see these areas. If your boat is equipped with a "fish finder" you will be able to locate these areas in deeper water.

Some fish, like trout and salmon, don't pay much attention to bottom structure. They're fussy. They like to spend time in depths where the water temperature is just right, especially if there are baitfish nearby. For these fish, you usually have to cover more water when you're trolling and let your lure do the work for you.

For these finicky fish, you want to select baits that have a lot of "flash". Often, these baits are a bit larger than most and they are designed to dart and flip through the water, imitating a smaller fish that looks injured and easy to catch. As a rule, you will want to start with a bait the same colour and approximate shape as the predominant baitfish in the area.

Once you catch a fish, it is a good idea to stop trolling and do some casting or still-fishing in the same area to see if other feeding fish are nearby. If this doesn't produce another fish, troll over the same area, at the same speed and going in the same direction as when you caught the first fish.

Some fish prefer their food presented at different speeds. Go figure. Try varying your speed between 4 and 9 kilometers per hour. That's from dead slow to not very fast. Fish, like walleye, bass and trout, are often lazy and



prefer slower speeds, while salmon, pike and muskie are often tricked into striking with a faster, livelier bait.

Downriggers are fancy but effective trolling devices for deep water. They have a heavy ball on a cable with a special clip that holds your line just tight enough to keep your bait running a few feet behind the ball. When a fish hits the lure: bingo! The added weight releases the line from the clip and the fight is on. Chances are, if you are in a boat with downriggers, the captain will know how to rig the lines and all you have to do is sit back and wait for the strike. It's a neat way to fish if you like to be waited on.



**TIP:** If you catch a fish and intend to keep it for the dinner table, check out the stomach contents for a clue as to what the fish was eating. (It's a bit icky, but it is interesting.) Chances are that the food you find will be a smaller fish, but it could be crayfish, frogs, leeches or insects. Next, select a lure that closely imitates the size and colour of the food. Then, try to impart the same kind of motion to your bait that simulates the movement of that critter just before he became supper.



## Drifting

ANOTHER GREAT WAY TO CATCH FISH is to let your boat drift with the wind along a shoreline or over some of those underwater structures we wanted to troll over. If you are alone, try getting your bait to different depths until you catch a fish, then stick with that depth. Just add or remove sinkers. For starters, get your bait to between 1 and 3 feet of bottom. If you have buddies along, start with everyone at a different depth. When one person catches a fish, have everyone try fishing at the same depth for a while. If fish aren't biting, try changing bait shapes and colours until you find one that works.

If the wind is causing you to drift too fast, try tying a bucket to a short rope and toss it overboard. The drag will slow you down.

## Still-fishing

LOTS OF BIG FISH HAVE BEEN CAUGHT just by anchoring a boat off a rock point or over a shoal, weed-bed or steep drop-off. It's a good way for larger groups to fish. Just dangle a minnow, worm or other form of live bait near the bottom. This is a terrific way for kids to fish. It is simple and safe because it eliminates the need for casting in a crowd. This is a great place to use a bobber. Set the bobber height on the line so the bait dangles about one or two feet above the bottom. This way, you don't get snagged on the bottom. It is important to keep loud noises in the boat to a minimum, but it's OK to have fun.

If the sun is shining, position your boat so the baits are on the shady side of the structure. If there is a breeze, anchor the boat so everyone has a chance to get their bait into the area where the fish are biting.





**TIP:** If fish aren't biting, try moving your rod tip up and down or side to side once in a while. Give it a little jerk, then let it lay very still for a few minutes. Sometimes fish get cranky and will bite when something they don't recognize drops into their living room.

## Get On the Water!

ALL OF THE PRECEEDING INFORMATION assumes that you own or have access to a boat. But we know that not all Canadians have had that opportunity yet. If you aren't a boater but would love to be, we recommend that you visit [www.discoverboating.ca](http://www.discoverboating.ca) to get started. Just as Catch Fishing introduces Canadians to the benefits of recreational fishing, Discover Boating is a great starting point to find out how much fun it is to be on a boat!

Boating safety is also important to remember for both novice and experienced boaters. The Canada Safe Boating Council has a wealth of information for all boaters at [www.csbc.ca](http://www.csbc.ca).

Check out both sites and remember to wear a life jacket when on the water!



## PART 5: WHERE TO FIND FISH

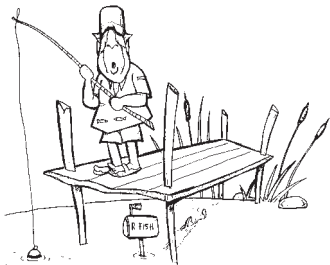
### Fishing Near Shore

HEY, IT'S NOT as hard as you might think. As a rule, fish, like humans, like to remain close to two things: food and shelter.

When we think back to what we decided to use for live bait, our list included living things that lived in or near shallow

water: frogs, minnows, leeches and the like. Therefore, it makes sense that when fish are hungry, they will move to shallow water. This can even be the case for many fish that live in oceans. Many species travel for miles to get to shorelines or shallow reefs like the Grand Banks off Newfoundland. Chances are good that food sources will be found in these areas where the water temperatures are usually warmer.

So, as a rule of thumb, much of your fishing should be done in that 10% of the water closest to shore or near shoals or reefs.



**FISH FACT:** Canada is regarded as having the finest sport fishery on the planet. We have approximately 1.2 million lakes, rivers and streams plus 3 oceans that contain 270 species of fish.



As for shelter, many fish like to be close to something. It might be a sloping shoreline, a shoal, stump, log, rock pile, boat dock, or floating object that might provide shade. Anglers refer to all these things collectively as "structure". Some fish use this structure for protection. Their silhouette is broken by being close to an object, making them harder for a predator like a shore bird or a larger fish to see. Other fish use structure to hide behind in order to ambush unsuspecting prey as it swims past.

Some species of fish, like trout and salmon, do not spend a lot of time in shallow water. These fish usually travel in schools. They actually use each other as "structure". They can hide among their friends and reduce the chance of becoming dinner for a predator that slashes through the school. It's a safety in numbers thing.

OK, so we've decided to spend most of our time fishing relatively close to shore or shoals. But remember, water depth is relative. For some large, deep waterbodies, shallow water could be 50 feet. For many others, it could be under 10 feet.

Where do you cast? Again, as a good rule of thumb, your lure or bait should be close to areas where the shoreline drops away more quickly than others in the vicinity. Rocky areas and rock piles are usually home to crayfish and smaller fish and are excellent places to cast. If you know the fish you are after prefer warm and very shallow water, try casting around logs, stumps, and areas of thick weeds.

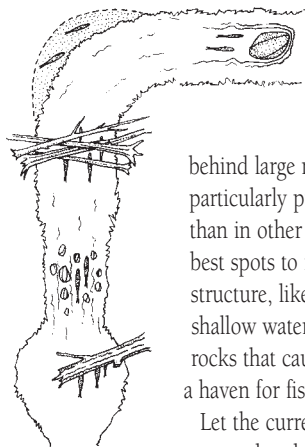


**TIP:** Fish on windswept shorelines. If the wind is blowing, and casting becomes a bit more difficult, try fishing the shorelines that have waves lapping on them. This wave action often roils the water near shore, creating ideal conditions for minnows or crayfish. If these smaller creatures are around, larger predator fish will not be far away.

## Fishing Streams and Rivers

SOME STREAM AND RIVER ANGLERS will tell you that this kind of fishing is so much fun it makes their palms sweat. Every stretch of water offers a whole new adventure. Here are some basic tips for locating fish and getting your bait where they can have a nibble.

Spinning and spincasting gear are fine for stream fishing. You do not require flyfishing equipment. Generally, you will use lighter line, up to six pound test, and live bait such as small worms or insects, like grasshoppers or maybe hellgrammites, on a single small hook. Unless the current is strong, you might not use sinkers or split-shot. Also, swivels may not be needed unless you are using a spinner for a bit of flash.



Fish in streams love shade. Use the current to carry your bait under structure such as log jams or other obstructions, beneath stream banks carved out by the current and

behind large rocks or boulders. These areas can be particularly productive if the water is a bit deeper than in other stretches. Deep pools are usually the best spots to fish, especially if they have a bit of structure, like large rocks or a submerged log. In shallow water areas look for a stretch with smaller rocks that cause a “riffle”. This surface current area is a haven for fish that are actively feeding.

Let the current carry your bait downstream at its own speed and try to position the bait so it will enter the “strike zone” naturally. By the way, culverts and bridges are favourite fishing holes because of the shade they offer. Cast upstream and let your



bait drift out of the culvert or the shade of the bridge and downstream a short distance before retrieving. Sometimes fish will follow your bait into the light before striking.

Rivers are just big streams. Many of them offer the same kind of hiding places for fish. Whether fishing from shore, wading or using a boat, remember, the current is your friend; use it to help present your bait at a natural speed. Both artificial and live baits work well in rivers.

If you are wading in a river or stream, don't take chances. Judge the force of the current and wade only where there is no chance of being swept downstream. Use footwear that provides good friction on slippery rocks.



**TIP:** In muddy or dark, stained water, use baits that emit a sound. Many baits come with rattles or propellers, or gurgle across the top of the water. This noise helps fish locate your bait.

## Urban Fishing

BELIEVE IT. Almost every city and town in Canada offers terrific fishing opportunities. Almost without exception there are streams, ponds, rivers or lakes within the city limits or very close by. In many cases they are under-utilized and offer a variety of fun-to-catch species.

Parks or conservation areas are often situated on waterways and fishing from bridges, docks, piers or river-banks can produce terrific results.



Some people have the notion that fishing improves the further you travel. Not true. Urban areas can provide many hours of fun fishing without the cost of a long trip.

If you live in a town or a city, check with your local tackle retailer. They will tell you the best and closest places to fish.

Fish in low light periods. Most fish are not fond of bright sunlight; their eyes are not adapted for bright conditions. While fish are unpredictable and can be caught almost anytime, most avid anglers will tell you that fishing in low light conditions usually produces more fish. Early mornings or evenings are prime fishing times; overcast days are also ideal. Fishing seems to improve when storms are approaching. Some diehards love to fish in the rain and well into the night.



**TIP:** Never dispose of fishing line in or near the water. Birds and animals find it attractive and many have been harmed or killed by becoming entangled in discarded line.

## Ice Fishing

IF YOU REALLY GET THE FISHING BUG, you can fish almost all year long. Some anglers prefer winter fishing to open-water angling. Ice fishing is permitted in all but a few areas of the country, and the fishing can be exceptional.

Obviously, the most important thing to do before you head out to your frozen destination is to confirm beyond all doubt that the ice is a safe thickness for you, your friends, and all your gear. Speaking of gear, you should take along an ice auger to drill your holes. Powered augers only



take a few seconds to drill through 30 inches of ice. A manual auger might take you closer to 3 or 4 minutes.

Deciding where to drill holes can be a little challenging, as many fish change their behaviour in winter. If you know the contour of the lake, try to drill your holes in different depths and over a variety of bottom structures. Safe ice, close to incoming streams, is often a good place to start. Mid-lake shoals can also be very productive.

As a rule, you will have more success if you move your bait up and down frequently. This is called jigging. Lift your rod three to five feet, a few times each minute. This can attract fish that would not otherwise see your bait.

Although artificial baits can be effective through the ice, most anglers prefer either live or dead minnows. Check the regulations in your area to be certain which baits are allowed. Check too, to confirm how many fishing lines you are allowed. Two lines are common, and you must stay close to those lines all the time you are fishing.

A great way to see if ice fishing is for you is to locate a hut rental operator and share the cost with a few friends. The hut is cozy, and operators usually place them on good fishing spots.



**TIP:** Freezing cold temperatures can harm fish. Any fish that you intend to release while ice fishing should be released immediately, preferably without taking it out of the water.

## PART 6: CATCHING, LANDING AND RELEASING FISH

### Was that a fish biting?

What does a bite feel like and what should you do when you feel it?

A bite can feel like a lot of things, but every time you feel a “bump” or “tug” on your line, even a very small one, lift your rod tip straight up, firmly, and as fast as you can. This is called setting the hook. If you feel any resistance at all, start to reel in your line. There’s a good chance you have caught a fish.



**TIP:** Use sharp hooks. Your hooks can never be too sharp. Keep a small whetstone or fine file in your tackle box and check the point of your hook from time to time, especially after you have been caught on bottom. Points often get dull, making it more difficult to set the hook through the tough mouth of a fish. Professional anglers sharpen their hooks constantly.

With live bait, like worms, a fish might nibble a couple of times, so you might get a second chance. But most often, particularly with lures or artificial bait, one chance is all you get to “set the hook.” More fish are lost because of slow or very weak hook-sets than for any other reason.

It takes a little practice to tell a bite or a “hit” from the feel of your bait bouncing on bottom or hitting a stick or weed. Set the hook every time



you feel something bump your line. Hook sets are free. If it isn't a fish it hasn't cost you a dime.



**TIP:** Don't be a lightning rod. Get off the water during thunder and lightning storms. Standing on shore or sitting in a boat holding a rod that can serve as a lightning conductor is just plain dumb.

## Landing a fish

If everything has gone right and you have hooked a fish, the next job is getting it to shore or the boat.

To do this, keep your rod tip up and face directly at the spot where your line disappears into the water. If you sense that the fish is relatively small and is quite easy to retrieve, keep reeling steadily. If it is a larger fish, hang on. You're in for some fun.

If you set your drag correctly, as we described back in the chapter on reels, a larger fish will be able to pull some line off your reel and you will hear a clicking sound from your reel. If you are having difficulty retrieving the fish and no line is being pulled, slowly turn your drag control clockwise until the fish is able to pull out some line. Continue reeling until the fish begins to come to you but can still pull some line. In this way, no matter how hard the fish pulls it can't break your line. Be careful not to loosen the drag too much with a large fish. If it pulls too much line out, the line will go slack between the rod tip and the fish. At this point, the fish could dislodge the hook and get away with a few shakes of its head.... then you'll be shaking your head.



As quickly as possible, without rushing, guide the fish toward the boat or shore and your landing net or shallow water. Once the fish is close, you have a decision to make. Is this a fish you will want to release or is it a fish you want to keep to eat?



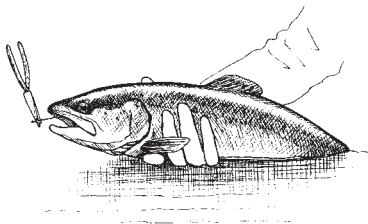
**TIP:** Never play a fish longer than you need to land it. A lengthy period of exertion could reduce the chances of the fish surviving if you plan to release it to swim, and perhaps spawn, another day.



**FISH FACT:** Anglers in Canada spend over \$8 billion a year on fishing-related purchases.

## Releasing fish

Your decision whether to keep or release a fish must be made quickly, as it determines how you will handle it. In some cases, the fish is obviously too small. In other cases, the fish could be too large or perhaps a species for which the season is not open. If you plan to eat your fish, try to keep fish that are in the smaller size range for that species. Generally, these are the best tasting. Larger fish are those that reproduce or spawn. Wherever possible, you are encouraged to release these carefully. There are



only a limited number of these fish in most waterbodies and they are critical to the continued survival of the population.

If you decide to release the fish, try not to handle it. By using your needle-nose pliers, you should be able to remove the hook from its mouth, sometimes without taking the fish out of the water.

If you must handle the fish to control it, wet your hand first. Never grasp a fish with dry hands as this removes the “slime coat” from their body and could result in infection. If you have to take a fish out of the water, start holding your breath. When you need to take another breath, the fish needs to be back in the water to get oxygen. Before you release the fish, it should appear to be alert and in an upright, swimming position. If it appears exhausted or injured, cradle it gently in your hands in an upright position and move it gently in an “S” motion so that water can flow over its gills, providing oxygen.

When it struggles to get free, let it swim away. If it is obvious that it will not recover, keep the fish if it is legal to possess it. If it is a fish you have caught accidentally and is out of season or outside an allowable slot size, by law, you must release it. Remember, Mother Nature will see that other fish, animals or organisms will use the carcass as food.

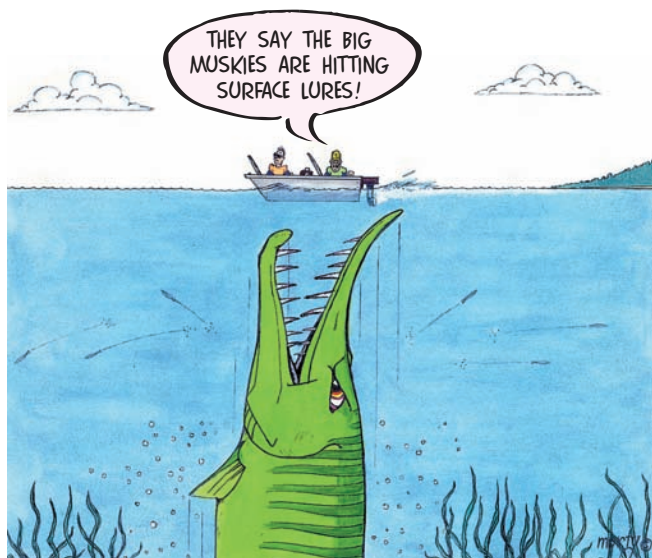


**TIP:** If a fish swallows your hook, do not pull on it or attempt to cut the tissue into which it is imbedded. Simply cut the line as close to the hook as possible and release the fish. There is a very good chance it will survive. The digestive juices of the fish are strong enough to corrode the hook, rendering it harmless.

If you are keeping the fish, it should be killed cleanly and quickly with a sharp rap on the head just behind the eyes. Keep the fish on ice in a cooler until you are ready to clean it. Properly handled fish are much better tasting than those that are not killed and put on ice quickly.



**TIP:** If you spot a piece of structure like a rock pile or two crossed logs, never cast your lure directly at the structure. Always cast about 20 feet past, then swim your bait slowly over, or immediately beside the item. This area is called the "strike zone". If you feel a bump on your line, set the hook. Hard!



## PART 7: CLEANING AND COOKING YOUR FISH

THE FIRST RULE OF FISH CLEANING is to be very careful. That's because the second rule of fish cleaning is to work with a very sharp knife.

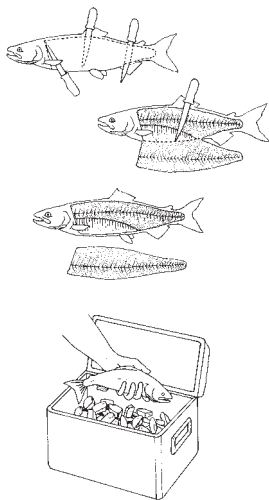
The best knife for the job is a fishing or filleting knife with a long, thin and flexible blade. Get one with a blade that is a little longer than the depth of the fish you normally catch.

There are two ways to cook fish: skin on or skin off. If you are leaving the skin on, the scales should be removed before cooking, using a tool called a scaler. Next, insert your knife in the vent (the opening in the belly

near the tail) and cut toward the gills. Cut around the head behind the gills and open the body cavity to remove the insides. Use a spoon to scrape out the material around the backbone. Cut off fins. This fish "in the round" is ready to cook.

If you're going to cook the fish with the skin off, it is best to fillet the fish on a flat surface. Follow these steps in order:

1. Holding the fish behind the head, make a cut behind the gill cover, from the backbone to just behind the first (pectoral) fin, being careful not to cut the backbone. Turn the fish over and repeat on the other side.



Cleaning and storing fish



2. Now, run the knife along one side of the backbone, cutting close to, but not through, the rib cage. Pull the meat away from the bones as you go.
3. Run your knife through the fish, from behind the dorsal fin down to the vent. Now, run the knife along the spine right back to the tail.
4. Repeat this cut on the other side of the fish, leaving two fillets, joined at the middle, skin attached. The entrails of the fish remain with the head, bones and fins.
5. Separate the two fillets at the middle. Lay each skin-side down on a flat surface. To remove the skin, hold the tail tightly and run your knife blade away from you, sliding between the skin and the flesh. Repeat on the other side of the fish. Keep the fillets of fish refrigerated until you are ready to cook them.



**TIP:** When you clean your fish, check the stomach contents to see what they have been eating. This will give you a clue as to what to use for bait.

## Let's eat!

Canada's fish are famous for their flavour. It is important not to over-cook fish or it will dry out and lose its taste. Cook fish a maximum of 10 minutes per inch of thickness.

Cookbooks have been written about cooking fish, but here are two very simple recipes to get you started. Both use skinless, boneless fillets of fish.

## Fish au naturel

Simply cook your fillets in a frying pan over medium heat in a little bit

of oil or butter. Be careful not to overcook. Turn once. Fish is done when it is soft and firm and will flake easily when separated with a fork.

If you wish to coat your fillets, dip them in a little milk or a beaten egg and then roll in coating (bread crumbs, special fish coating, or cracker crumbs) before frying.

## Fish in foil

An aluminum foil package is a great way to cook fish or fillets at a campfire or in the oven at home.

Wrap your fish and a couple of dabs of margarine in two layers of foil. Season with garlic powder and a little pepper. If it suits your taste, you can top the fish with slices of lemon, lime or onion.

Seal carefully and place on the hot coals of a campfire, turning at least once. Remember, no more than 10 minutes of cooking for each inch of thickness. In an oven at home, place the wrapped fillets on a cookie sheet in a 375 degree oven for 10 minutes. Check to be sure fish is cooked before serving.

There are thousands of fish recipes to be found in fishing magazines, cookbooks and on the internet. Experimenting with new recipes is a big part of the fun of fishing.



**TIP:** Fish will keep on ice for a couple days and can be frozen for some great eating up to about 6 months. But for the best possible flavour, eat it fresh.



## PART 8: FISHING WITH KIDS

YOU CAN'T BEAT FISHING as a perfect activity the whole family can enjoy. There are lakes, rivers and streams close to virtually every person living in Canada. The cost of equipment is far less than almost any other sport you can name, and fishing is great fun for kids and adults of all ages.

Experts in child psychology pick fishing as one of the very best ways parents can spend time with their kids. Kids feel reassured and valued when they spend time enjoying the same activity as their parents. The shared experience contributes to a child's emotional development. But most of all, fishing is just plain fun.

### Some tips for parents

- When selecting a time to go fishing, especially the first time, try to avoid days when the weather is questionable. Rainstorms and high winds can ruin an outing.
- Check with your local fishing tackle retailer or an experienced angler to find a location where the kids are most likely to catch fish, even small ones like perch or other panfish. Kids care more about catching numbers of fish. Size is not as important to them.



- Match the length of the outing to their attention span. Younger kids tend to get bored more easily than older ones. If they show signs of boredom, or if the fishing action is a little slow, encourage them to go for a swim or go exploring. There are always lots of neat things to check out when you are beside a river or lake. If you are in a boat, go for a ride from time to time, or stop off at shore and take a short walk.
- Take plenty of drinks and snacks along. Make it a special event.
- Make sure everyone is dressed to be comfortable. Take along rainsuits, sunscreen, insect repellent and hats to help guarantee a reasonable comfort level for everyone.
- Try not to measure the success of your trip by the number of fish caught. Often, kids and adults alike find enjoyment just experiencing the outdoors. The fishing is often just an excuse to spend time together.
- If you intend to keep some fish to eat, make sure to follow the fish handling instructions in the earlier chapters. This will ensure that kids learn to develop a respect for fish and understand that eating fish is an acceptable practice; and, they learn to handle them humanely.



**FISH FACT:** When a hook penetrates a fish's mouth, it does not feel pain. If a fish had pain sensors in its mouth, it would not be able to eat spiny critters like crayfish and the spiny rays of fish fins and would die of starvation.

## PART 9: WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

YOU HAVE ALL THE INFORMATION YOU NEED. It's time to "Catch Fishing!" Oh yeah. Now that you are officially qualified as a genuine Canadian angler you are duty bound to introduce others to this magnificent pastime. Enjoy!

**There's a dream fish waiting for you!**



Photo: Bill Otway

*l. to r.* Rick Amsbury, Gerry Scott and guide Fred Helmer with 600 lb. sturgeon, Fraser River, B.C.



Date	Body of Water	Weather	Fish Caught/Released	Biggest Fish




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