

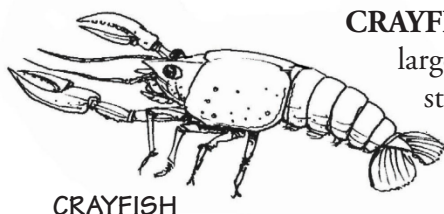
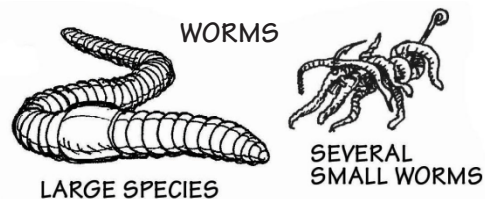
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BASIC FRESHWATER BAITS

There are many different baits available to make it easy for everyone to get in on the fun of freshwater fishing. These include commercial baits bought from tackle and bait shops, baits that you can find in your yard, and baits that you can make from natural materials. Let's look at the baits available and how to use them.

WORMS – Worms include large species, often called earthworms or night crawlers, and small, frisky manure worms. Earthworms and night crawlers are found in any lawn and can be easily gathered after a rain or found under boards or rocks. Smaller manure worms are found around farms. Large worms are good baits for walleyes and bass, while small worms are good whole or in pieces for panfish, sunfish, and trout.



CRAYFISH – Crayfish are a main food source for fish such as smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, walleye and large trout. They can be bought from bait stores or captured by using a window screen or fine mesh net in the water. Stir the water to chase the crayfish into the net. Store in moist rags, damp sphagnum moss or a bait bucket.

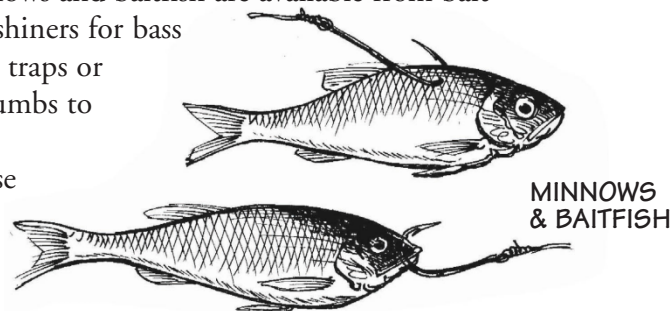
CRAYFISH

MINNOWS AND BAITFISH – Many types of minnows and baitfish are available from bait stores. These can range from small minnows to large shiners for bass and pike fishing. Capture minnows by using minnow traps or mesh minnow screens/nets. Use bait such as bread crumbs to attract the minnows to a trap and check the trap daily.

For a minnow net or screen suspended from a rope, use crumbs to attract the minnows and raise the net frequently to capture the prey. Vertical minnow nets can be pulled through the water to capture minnows and sometimes crayfish.

Store minnows in a minnow bucket using the same water from which they were bought or captured and use them as soon as possible.

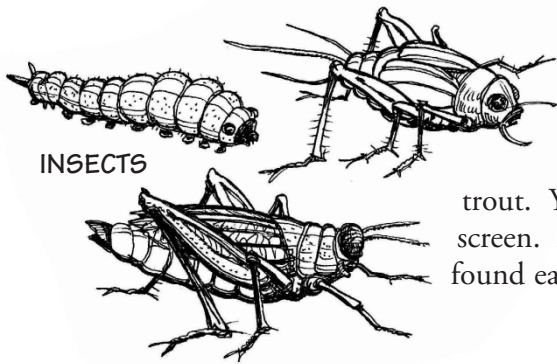
Minnow buckets are special buckets with an internal perforated container designed to hold minnow and allow retrieval of them through a snap lid.



LEECHES – Leeches are almost always bought from bait stores and are ideal for walleye, sauger and other deep water fish. Store the leeches in a bucket similar to those used for minnows. Leeches are hardy and will last a long time.

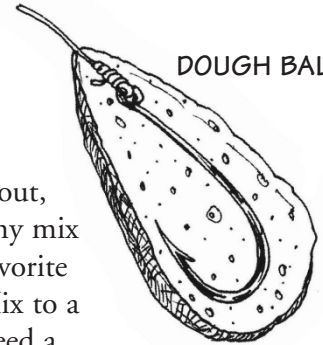
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INSECTS

INSECTS – Insects such as ants, beetles, grasshoppers, crickets, caterpillars, etc., are ideal for panfish, sunfish and trout. You can buy crickets or capture field insects by using a net or screen. Ants can be gathered from a nest, and caterpillars can be found eating leaves on trees and plants.



DOUGH BALLS

DOUGH BALLS – Dough balls and similar bait balls are available commercially, as is the prepared mix from which you can form your own dough balls. These are labeled and sold for specific fish species such as trout, panfish, carp and catfish. To make your own dough balls, stir up a doughy mix of hot water and flour or cornmeal and add a favorite flavoring. Some favorite scents for all fish include garlic, licorice, anise, and strawberry gelatin. Mix to a doughy consistency and store in the refrigerator until used. If you only need a small amount of dough or are short of time, use soft white bread and squeeze it into a doughy mass.



CUT BAIT FOR STILL FISHING

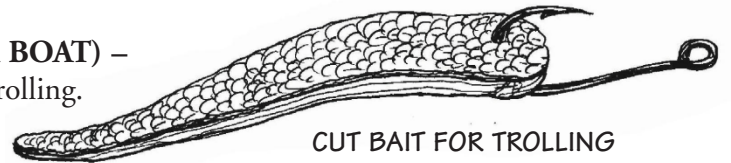
CUT BAIT FOR STILL FISHING

(FISHING IN ONE SPOT WITH BAIT)

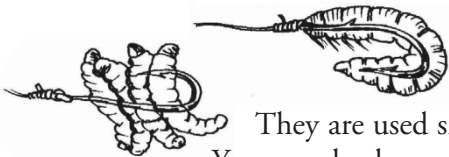
– You can use any caught fish, including bait fish, to make cut bait to catch more fish. To prepare cut bait, fillet your catch and cut bait chunks from each side. For best results, scale the fish but leave the skin on. Thread the hook through the skin of the fish to help keep the bait on the hook. Cut bait is ideal for still fishing using a float or on bottom rigs.

CUT BAIT FOR TROLLING (DRAGGING A BAIT OR LURE BEHIND A BOAT)

– You can use caught fish to cut strips of bait for trolling. For this, use the thin belly area and cut long "V"-shaped strips for adding to a hook and trolling to simulate a fish or eel. Include a pectoral or pelvic fin on the bait to increase the attractiveness to the fish. If necessary, scale the fish strip but thread the hook through the skin to help keep the bait intact.



CUT BAIT FOR TROLLING



GRUBS & MEALWORMS

GRUBS AND MEAL WORMS – Grubs and meal worms are commonly sold baits readily available from tackle and bait shops.

They are used singly or in multiples and are ideal for panfish, sunfish and trout. You can also harvest grubs from the soil and from unusual swellings and deformities – galls – that you find on the leaves and twigs of trees and plants.

FRESHWATER MUSSELS AND CLAMS – If clams or mussels are native to your area, you can use them as bait. Gather the mussels and clams from shallow waters before or while you are fishing. Crack the shell to open, cut out the clam or mussel, and allow the bait to harden in the sun slightly to help keep it on the hook. To keep the bait as fresh as possible, open the clams or mussels as you use them and only when you need new bait.



FRESHWATER MUSSELS & CLAMS

OTHER TIPS

- Before taking or using any bait in any waters, check your local, state or federal regulation agencies to make sure that it is legal and that you conform to all harvesting requirements.
- Don't throw away extra bait in the water. Do not litter with bait containers. Bait can harm or pollute waterways or survive to eat foods meant for native fish and animals. Litter and trash can lead to restrictions or prohibitions against fishermen and fishing in certain areas.
- Be sure that you can use your selected bait in the waters you wish to fish. Often trout fishing areas have restrictions on bait or even lures, and many warmwater lakes have prohibitions on using and/or releasing unused baitfish. Check first!
- Fishing with a group? Try an experiment, with each of you using a different bait to see which one works best.
- For additional information on baits and bait rigs, see our other fishing tip sheets at takemefishing.org. These include **BASIC HOOK, SINKER AND LEADER RIGS FOR FRESHWATER FISHING**, **BASIC BAIT HOOKING**, and **THE KID'S GUIDE TO FINDING FISHING BAIT**.