

LEARNING MADE EASY



3rd Edition

# Fishing

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand



Catch the fish you want,  
and more of them

Choose the right gear and  
the right locations to fish

Get the whole family  
involved safely

**Greg Schvipps**

Fishing and nature writer





# Fishing

3rd Edition

**by Greg Schwipps**  
**with Peter Kaminsky**

(Author of the 1st and 2nd Editions)

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand

## Fishing For Dummies®, 3rd Edition

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# Introduction

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**N**early fifty million Americans fish, and they can't all be nuts. Okay, maybe they can be. They're crazy-passionate about fishing and all that the hobby brings with it. They love the scenery, the camaraderie, the silence, the fight of the fish, the photographs of smiling people holding fish. They love to eat fish, or they love to fight the fish only to release it to fight again another day. They love to fish with their kids, grandparents, spouses, and friends. They love to be outdoors, near water. Don't you need a hobby to feel this passionate about?

Practically anyone can fish. Young people can fish with adult supervision, and they learn great lessons about nature and the environment, among other things, while doing it. Seniors can fish, and many retire every year with plans to do just that. With the help of handicap-accessible ramps and piers, and even motorized reels, those with physical disabilities can fish. Fish pay no attention to race, sexual orientation, or religion. Thanks to millions of acres of public waterways, fishing can be enjoyed by the wealthy and not so rich alike. Fishing is one of the most welcoming outdoor activities around.

Fishing isn't predictable, though (which, for some, is another reason to love it). Fishing takes you outdoors, and not just to the well-manicured and maintained golf courses and ski slopes. Although you can fish in brightly lit and public places, you don't have to, and some fishing finds you in some pretty wild places, indeed. You're always fishing near water, of course, some of it deep and fast-flowing, and there are plenty of sharp hooks around. For that reason, it's not a hobby to be taken lightly. You need to know what you're doing, and this book helps you get there.

## About This Book

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You're holding the 3rd Edition of *Fishing For Dummies*. It builds on the successes of the 2nd Edition and features much new and updated material that I (Greg) added to the original, which was written by Peter Kaminsky. For example, I added much of the material about boating, using circle hooks, and the pursuit of such fun quarry as catfish. In this 3rd Edition, I've included more information about the latest technology that helps anglers catch fish, more on how to rig for specific

species of fish, and more information in general. And Peter also chimes in from time to time with tips, advice, and anecdotes, especially involving fly fishing and saltwater fishing.



TIP

For much more information on the joys of fly fishing, you need to check out the latest edition of Peter's book, *Fly Fishing For Dummies*.

Just as your fishing gear and skills will evolve as you gain experience, the information in this book moves logically from more basic to advanced topics. You don't have to start here and keep reading in order to make sense of anything you find. This isn't a textbook — if a particular topic on the table of contents piques your interest, turn right to it; within every chapter we define terms and point you in the direction of any additional information that might help you located in another chapter.

Like all *For Dummies* books, this one aims to give you the information you need — say, to choose workable fishing gear, hook and land a fish, and know what to do with it once you land it — without burying you in obtuse language and terminology. You find here instead a casual and fun introduction to multispecies angling that we hope answers all your questions and encourages you to spend more time fishing.

We use the following conventions throughout the text to make things consistent and easy to understand:

- » New terms appear in *italic* and are closely followed by an easy-to-understand definition.
- » **Bold** highlights the action parts of numbered steps and key words in bullet lists.

We intend for this book to be a pleasant and practical read so that you can quickly find and absorb the fishing material you seek. However, we sometimes can't help going a little bit deeper or relaying information that expands on the basics. You might find this information interesting, but you don't need it to understand what you came to that section to find.

When you see a Technical Stuff icon or a sidebar (a gray-shaded box of text), know that the information next to the icon or in the box is optional. You can lead a full and happy fishing life without giving it a glance. (But here's a chance to make your fishing life even fuller and happier!)

# Foolish Assumptions

Before we could write this book, we had to make some assumptions about who you, the reader, might be. We assume that you

- » Have either fished before or want to start
- » Want to have fun while fishing
- » Are curious to know more about fish
- » Desire to develop skills to fish in a variety of places
- » Would like to know how to catch more than one kind of fish
- » Seek to better understand the gear available
- » Crave new information about fishing but don't have endless time to devote to the hobby

## Icons Used in This Book

One of the great things about a *For Dummies* book is the interactive icons used to highlight or illustrate a point. Here are the icons we've used throughout this book to draw your attention:



REMEMBER

Some points are worth hammering home. When we reference a concept that we've discussed elsewhere or that is particularly important to your fishing experience, we use this icon.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

We try to keep the information in this book light, but when we can't resist delving deeply into a technique or piece of equipment, we use this icon to let you know that the information is skippable.



TIP

This icon sits next to any information that saves you time, money, or frustration in your quest for better fishing.



WARNING

Some actions can hurt the fish, your equipment, or you. We mark those with this dangerous-looking icon.

# Beyond the Book

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This book comes with a free online Cheat Sheet that includes helpful reference material that you can peruse from your computer or mobile device.

To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and type “Fishing For Dummies Cheat Sheet” in the Search box.

# Where to Go from Here

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We’ve organized this book so that you can either read it start to finish or dip into it here and there to find whatever specific information meets your needs. If you think you’re ready to pick out a new rod and reel, turn to Chapter 7 for advice on how to choose a good one. If you’d rather get tips on how to evaluate a lake you’ve never fished before, check out Chapter 3. If you’re pretty sure your first fish will deserve a spot on the wall, check out what we say about fiberglass replicas in Chapter 19. If you prefer traditional angling and traditional reading, turn the page and read this sucker straight through.

Enjoy *Fishing For Dummies*, 3rd Edition, and go fishing!

# 1

## **Before the Bite**

### **IN THIS PART . . .**

Getting to know the fish you're after

Understanding fish anatomy

Evaluating fishing water you've never seen before



#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Seeing the positives of fishing
- » Figuring out where to fish
- » Meeting common fish
- » Gathering the basic gear
- » Exploring fishing techniques
- » Catching fish, and taking the next steps

## Chapter 1

# Getting Hooked on Fishing

Nearly 50 million anglers walk among us in the United States, and while some are more dedicated than others to the hobby, all of them are gaining something positive from the experience. Fishing offers a chance to be near family and friends — a time to bond without the distraction of screens. Or it can be a time to be alone. To fish, you must consider the world of your quarry, the water, and that means imagining a world far different from your own. Catching fish is exciting. Sometimes it enables you to procure and prepare your own food. Sometimes it affords you the thrill of the hunt with the opportunity to return your catch to the water. Importantly, by purchasing fishing licenses and supplies, you can help fund your local conservation efforts.

Because I've been fishing for almost my entire life, and have been fascinated by fish from my first memories (there's a photo of me wearing nothing but a diaper, holding a big largemouth bass my dad had brought home), people often ask me why I'm so captivated by fishing. Even though I think about fish every single day, the answer is a little complicated.

I think I fish for the same reasons so many others do: It's a chance to connect with nature, to get outside, to be a small part of something bigger than my own

schedule or routine for a while. I fish because I like hanging out in the places where fish live – being near water calms me. Fish don't always behave the way I think they should, or follow my plans for them. The weather doesn't either. I like that unpredictability because it forces me to react, to strategize, to ponder. I like angling because I like spending time with fellow anglers. I crave the excitement fishing offers. When I have a disappointing fishing trip (and what they say is true — there is no bad day fishing), I can't wait to go again. When I have a great fishing trip, I can't wait to go again.

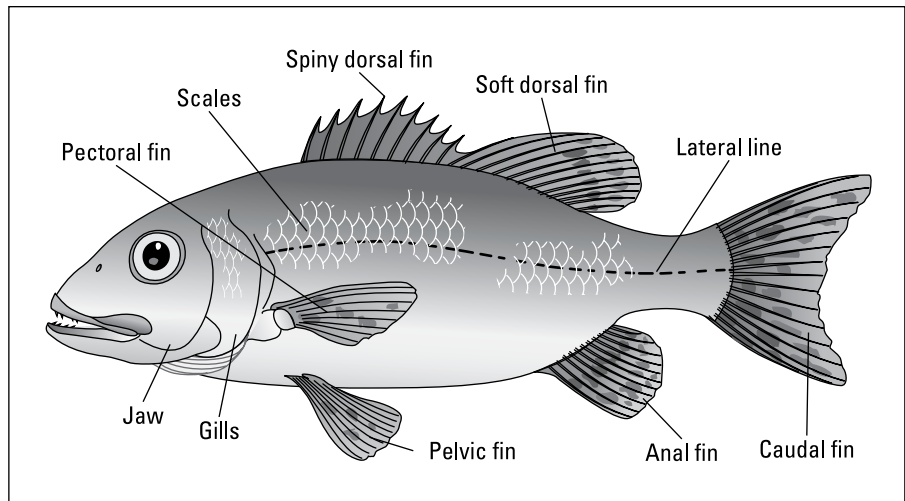
I hope you can find something in fishing that sustains you, too. In this chapter, I give you an overview of this sport I love, from the motivation to get out there to an idea of where you should go to give it a try. Because there's some gear involved, as well as skill and technique, I introduce you to these topics as well, so that you're prepared to fish successfully.

## Why Fish?

Fish are alive, and although some studies suggest that they do not feel pain, at least not in a capacity anywhere near the way I do, they do not jump at the chance to be caught. Using your gear and more importantly your mind, you must outmaneuver the fish. This presents an interesting, constantly shifting challenge.

Obviously, fish live in an environment much different from ours. Understand, though, that they're well-suited to that environment. With a few exceptions, they're cold-blooded and possess a good sense of smell. They live in the water (you already knew that), have backbones, and pull oxygen from the water through gills. They are shaped to move efficiently through water (many look like torpedoes), using fins to navigate, and most are covered with scales. All fish are also covered with a slime-like mucus that protects them from disease and injury. (This is why you should only handle fish with wet hands — dry hands or a towel will remove this valuable slimecoat.) Fish don't have external ears, but they do have internal ones and are highly sensitive to noise like the thudding of a boat hull. Fish possess a lateral line, running from tail to head, that they use to detect low-frequency vibrations. They use this organ to locate prey and evade predators, while also gathering information about water temperature and current. So fish might not share many characteristics with humans, but they're a more than able opponent when it comes to people trying to outsmart them. They know their surroundings as well as you know your living room. Figure 1-1 shows a typical fish, with some of the traits described here.

**FIGURE 1-1:**  
Meet your  
average fish.



© John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Every angler has a particular reason for pursuing the sport, and after a few trips out to the water you're likely to figure out what it is you appreciate and enjoy about it, too. Whether you are after excitement, peace and quiet, or a healthy food source, fishing has something for everyone.

## For the outdoors

You probably already know this, but fishing is an outdoor activity. So the first reason to take up fishing is that it requires you to go outside. Some of us think that there's something soul-supporting about being outdoors, especially in those places that are inherently wild and unmarked by humans.

## For the enjoyment

Take up fishing because you need some time spent quietly by yourself. Or take up fishing because you want to spend quality time with your family or friends. Two anglers fishing in a boat, or wading their way quietly upstream, won't be distracted by scrolling news programs, honking cars, or instant messages. Cell-phones can be turned off, and social media can be ignored for a while. Whether alone or in a small group, fishing quiets the mind.

This is not to suggest that all fishing is quiet! When a monster fish thrashes near the boat, or goes airborne trying to throw the hook, the adrenaline rush the angler feels rivals that of a linebacker after a crushing tackle or a tennis player after serving an ace. It's a physical sensation. (See Chapter 18 to find out how to land that behemoth bass.)

What fishing provides me might be one thing. You too will find a way to make fishing work for you. If you crave excitement, fish in a way that offers it. If you seek peaceful, introspective time, fishing can give you that, as well. And no one will make you commit to one kind of fishing all the time. Your fishing can evolve as you do.

## For the table

Our ancestors fished for food, and you can, too. Fish are great tasting and good for you, as well. Chapters 20 and 21 tell you how to prepare fish for the table, as I even offer you some proven recipes, allowing you to make wonderful meals of your fresh-caught fish.

Many people today care about where their food comes from, and we like the idea of eating locally grown food. Well, when it comes to sustainability, fishing is tough to beat. Fish are a renewable resource. Selective harvest will ensure that we all have plenty of high-quality food available forever, possibly from a source close to your home. As long as the water quality of your fishing spot remains good, a properly prepared fish can add a healthy option to your menu.

# Where Should You Fish?

Chapter 3 discusses this issue in detail, but the best advice I can give you is to fish wherever you can. (Later, I also advise you to fish whenever you can.) Big fish come from both large and small waters. Beautiful places to fish can be found locally. Slip down into a streambed and you might be surprised at what you find. Many subdivision ponds are stocked, and some of them face very little fishing pressure. Salt-water inlets and tidal rivers attract wonderfully large (and tasty) fish at times, too.

Part of the joy and challenge of fishing lies in finding your favorite spots. Fish move seasonally, especially in rivers and oceans, so catching a particular species of fish all year long will often involve traveling to follow their migrations. (This also means that a new quarry might suddenly arrive!) You'll also learn to go to different locales to catch different kinds of fish during certain times of the year.

## Fishing freshwater

Not all freshwater fishing is the same, and almost every state offers a wide range of fishing possibilities. Michigan, for example, offers everything from small stream fishing for rainbow trout to Great Lakes fishing for king salmon. Even states far from giant bodies of water boast rivers of varying sizes and both natural

and manmade lakes. Your gear, and your approach, will vary quite a bit from place to place, but this too is part of the fun of fishing.

Much freshwater fishing depends on current: You're fishing in either moving or calm water. And there are a lot of fish — and a lot of techniques to fish for them — in both kinds of water. Wherever you live, you are close to good freshwater fishing. Chapter 3 will help you learn how to find it.

## Fishing saltwater

Saltwater fishing possibilities might not always be local since we don't all live near a coast. When you find saltwater, you find an almost limitless variety of fish. Many of the techniques used in freshwater carry over to saltwater; however, the game changes a bit when you're dealing with the fast, strong fish of the oceans.

For this reason, saltwater fishing can be intimidating. But if you limit your initial forays into saltwater fishing to inshore waters — places like estuaries, beaches, bays, and marshes — you'll find that even beginners can find plenty of exciting action.

## What Are You Fishing For?

I once caught a flathead catfish that measured more than 49 inches long from a river that you can wade across in spots. This led my wife to remark, “Why did I ever dip my toes in there?!”

So what are you fishing for? Both salt- and freshwater bodies of water boast a vast range of species, many of which can be taken on rod and reel. Maybe you prefer to catch mostly bluegill and crappie, often taking a mess of fish home to fry. Or maybe you've found great sport by wading flats of big lakes, taking carp on a fly rod.



REMEMBER

Your favorite species might change over time, and you can always adjust your gear and tactics to specialize. You might switch seasonally, too. Some fish stop biting when the water reaches 50 degrees in the fall, whereas others bite all winter long. When you get into fishing, I promise you're not going to exhaust the possibilities.

## Common freshwater catches

Just as there are many different kinds of habitat for freshwater fish, there are many different kinds of fish populating those habitats. Trout require cooler water. Largemouth bass do well in everything from farm ponds to big reservoirs, and anglers pursue them wherever they swim.

Big rivers hide big fish like catfish, striped bass, and carp, as well as smallmouth bass and white bass. Natural and manmade lakes can be home to any kind of freshwater fish, including walleye, northern pike, and muskies. Bluegill and other panfish like crappies can be found everywhere, as well, from the largest river to retention ponds in subdivisions. Freshwater fish represent a diverse collection of gamefish, and each one of them brings something different to the angler.

For complete coverage of freshwater fish, turn to Chapter 4.

## Common saltwater catches

The sky's the limit, or in the case of saltwater fishing, the sea's the limit. Even fishing inshore waters, anglers can catch everything from tarpon to flounder. Anglers fishing the northeast coast can expect flounder and cod to congregate in bays and river mouths. Striped bass and bluefish fall for lures from surfcasters, as will weakfish and seatrout.

Farther south, red drum (redfish), tarpon, and bonefish excite anglers as they cruise the shallow flats of bays. These fish can be taken on traditional gear or fly-fishing tackle. Snook fight like the saltwater version of the largemouth bass, and sharks cruise off many coasts. With saltwater fishing, you don't really know what you're going to catch next, which is part of its great allure.

For the lowdown on the range of saltwater fish available to you, check out Chapter 5.

## What Do You Need to Fish?

Commercial fishermen — those fishing to gather fish or shellfish for food — often use devices like nets, traps, or long lines with multiple hooks to take fish. This book deals with sportfishing, which is fishing with a rod and reel. So, just as you need a few clubs to golf, you need a rod and reel to fish in the traditional sport-fishing manner.

Beyond the rod and reel, your needs are few. You need a hook to snare the fish's mouth, and a line to get that hook from the rod to the water. You can keep your fishing simple. But, just as a golfer probably acquires more than a couple of clubs, anglers tend to gather the equipment that makes the pursuit of their favorite fish more successful and pleasurable.