Beginners Fishing Guide
There’s nothing better than a lazy afternoon on the bank of your favorite fishing hole, dreaming about a lunker that’s about to make your bobber disappear.

If you’re already a fisherman, then you know the thrill of anticipation. If you’re not an angler, this publication will help you get started.

Now that we’ve piqued your interest, you may realize that you’ve got a few things to learn about fish and angling. No problem – the basic fishing techniques described in this guide don’t require a huge tackle box. A rod, reel, hook, bobber and a few worms will work just fine.

After you land your trophies, we’ll help you identify them and show you how to prepare and cook your catch of the day.

You’ve made it this far – let’s get moving. Take a gander at the guide and head out to enjoy the best of what Arkansas water has to offer.

Sincerely,

Scott Henderson, Director
Arkansas Game and Fish Commission

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Beginners Fishing Guide

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Keeping the Natural State natural.
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If you cannot find the answer to your fishing question,
please call (877) 676-6963.
Healthy fish need water, food, cover and space. These four things are called “habitat.” It’s important that people take good care of lakes and streams so fish and other life in the water will have what they need to stay healthy.
Arkansas has one of the largest state-owned systems of fish hatcheries in the United States.

Bream

Fishing Fun for Everyone
Mention bream in Arkansas and you’re talking about the sunfish family. Bream are numerous and very easy to catch. They will bite just about anything — earthworms, corn, jigs, you name it. They can be found in just about any stream, lake or pond and are great to eat.

Nicknames: Sun perch, copperbelly
Habitat: Found in relatively clear, slow-moving streams, ponds and lakes
Preferred Water Temperature: 75-80 degrees
Spawning Temperatures and Time: 67-70 degrees; April-August
Natural/Live Bait: Crickets, aquatic insects, earthworms, maggots and catalpa worms
Artificial Lures: Jigs, small spinners, plastic/hair grubs, popping bugs and insect imitations

Bluegill

Nicknames: Sun perch, copperbelly
Habitat: Found in relatively clear, slow-moving streams, ponds and lakes
Preferred Water Temperature: 73-77 degrees
Spawning Temperatures and Time: 67-70 degrees; April to mid-August
Natural/Live Bait: Crickets, aquatic insects, earthworms, maggots and catalpa worms
Artificial Lures: Jigs, small spinners, plastic/hair grubs, popping bugs and insect imitations

Redear Sunfish

Nicknames: Shellcracker, government-improved bream
Habitat: The bottom of clear, quiet waters with moderate vegetation
Preferred Water Temperature: 73-77 degrees
Spawning Temperatures and Time: 66-70 degrees; April to mid-August
Natural/Live Bait: Earthworms, crickets, grubs, maggots, catalpa worms and freshwater grass shrimp
Artificial Lures: Redears rarely take artificials
Green Sunfish

Nicknames: Ricefield slick, greenie, perch
Habitat: Ponds, lakes and slow-moving streams and ditches. Found in thick, weedy cover and can tolerate murky, warm water.
Preferred Water Temperature: 80-84 degrees
Spawning Temperatures and Time: 69-73 degrees; April-August
Natural/Live Bait: Aquatic insects, crayfish, earthworms, crickets, catalpa worms and maggots
Artificial Lures: Small spinners, jigs, plastic/hair grubs, popping bugs and insect imitations

Longear Sunfish

Nicknames: Big-eared sunfish, sun perch
Habitat: Found in clear, rocky bottom, upland streams, oxbows, lowland lakes and lowland streams
Preferred Water Temperature: 68-70 degrees
Spawning Temperature: 70-80 degrees
Natural/Live Bait: Aquatic insects can be more than 80 percent of the longear’s diet
Artificial Lures: Small spinners, jigs, plastic/hair grubs, popping bugs and insect imitations
Rock Bass: Rock, Shadow and Ozark

**Nicknames:** Goggle-eye, redeye

**Habitat:** Found in clear, weedy, fast-moving streams with rocky bottoms

**Preferred Water Temperature:** 69-70 degrees

**Spawning Temperatures and Time:** 60-70 degrees; April-May

**Natural/Live Bait:** Crayfish, crayfish tails, aquatic insects, small fish, earthworms, crickets and maggots

**Artificial Lures:** Popping bugs, jigs, small spinners and plastic worms/grubs

Warmouth

**Nicknames:** Stumpknocker, goggle-eyed perch

**Habitat:** Shallow lakes, ponds, sloughs and slow-moving streams with muddy bottoms, lots of weeds, stumps and logs

**Preferred Water Temperature:** 80-85 degrees

**Spawning Temperature and Time:** 65-70 degrees; April to mid-August

**Natural/Live Bait:** Earthworms, insects, maggots, grubs, catalpa worms, small fish and crickets

**Artificial Lures:** Popping bugs, jigs, small spinners and grubs
Bream Habitat

Fishing for Words

Use the words in the box to complete the following sentences.

1. All anglers should know their state’s fishing _______ and regulations.
2. Never cast when someone is ____________________ behind you.
3. ____________ can be used to catch all types of bream.
4. _______________ rarely take artificials, unlike bluegills.
5. More than 80 percent of the ________________’s diet is aquatic insects.

CRICKETS
LONGEARS
RULES
REDEARS
STANDING
Natural/Live Bait

- crayfish
- crickets and grasshoppers
- insect larvae
- earthworms
- grass shrimp
Artificial Lures

Lead-headed jigs and jig bodies (feathers, natural hair or plastic) can be mixed and matched in any combination. Fish sometimes respond better to different colors.

How to Use an Artificial Lure.

Retrieved near cover.
Black Bass
Bass are popular targets for Arkansas anglers. Three types of black bass live in Arkansas – largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass. Bass live in rivers, streams, lakes and ponds.

Largemouth Bass

Nicknames: Bucketmouth, bigmouth, green bass
Habitat: Found in lakes, ponds, rivers and streams statewide.
They prefer waters with submerged vegetation and flooded timber and brush.
In streams, they prefer slow-moving current.
Preferred Water Temperature: 68-78 degrees
Spawning Temperatures and Time: 62-68 degrees; April-June
Natural/Live Bait: Minnows, earthworms, crayfish, small fish and frogs
Artificial Lures: Spinner baits, buzzbaits, soft-bodied lures, top-water lures, popping bugs, flies, crankbaits, jigs and spoons

Smallmouth Bass

Nicknames: Brown bass, brownie, bronzeback
Habitat: Clean, cool streams and lakes.
In streams, they like areas with moderate current.
Preferred Water Temperature: 67-71 degrees
Spawning Temperatures and Time: 60-65 degrees; April to mid-June
Natural/Live Bait: Minnows, earthworms, crayfish, small fish and frogs
Artificial Lures: Spinner baits, buzzbaits, small soft-bodied lures, top-water lures, popping bugs, flies, crankbaits and jigs
Spotted Bass

Nicknames: Kentucky bass, spots
Habitat: Rivers, streams and deep reservoirs
Preferred Water Temperature: 74-77 degrees
Spawning Temperatures and Time: 62-68 degrees; April-June
Natural/Live Bait: Minnows, earthworms, crayfish, small fish and frogs
Artificial Lures: Spinner baits, buzzbaits, soft-bodied lures, top-water lures, popping bugs, flies, crankbaits, jigs and spoons

Black Bass Habitat
Natural/Live Bait

- Crayfish
- Minnow
- Shad
- Small sunfish
- Crickets and grasshoppers
- Earthworms
- Frogs
Artificial Lures

depth-dive crankbait
grub
spoon
lipless crankbait
top-water popper
swim bait
beetle
grup
spinner bait
jig

top-water prop bait

Lure Use and Techniques

crankbait
Fish will hit crankbait as it bumps over obstructions.

plastic worm
Vary retrieve by stopping occasionally after bump.
Catfish Can Be Caught Almost Any Time
Catfish are abundant in Arkansas’s streams, lakes and rivers. They are very easy to catch and are excellent to eat, so they are very popular with anglers. The AGFC stocks about 1 million channel catfish every year. Catfish rarely take artificial lures, but sometimes bite spinners, jigs and spoons.

Channel Catfish

Nicknames: Spotted cat, fiddlers
Habitat: Commonly found in big rivers, in current over deep stretches with sand, rock or gravel bottoms. They are stocked in lakes, ponds and streams throughout the state.
Preferred Water Temperature: 75-80 degrees
Spawning Temperatures and Time: 70-75 degrees; late April-June
Natural/Live Bait: Earthworms, crayfish, shad and minnows
Prepared baits: Stink bait, blood bait, cheese bait, chicken gizzards, chicken hearts, liver and cut bait

Blue Catfish

Nicknames: Blues, white cat
Preferred Water Temperature: 72-78 degrees
Spawning Temperatures and Time: 70-75 degrees; April-May
Natural/Live Bait: Shad, minnows, crayfish
Prepared baits: Stink bait, blood bait, cheese bait, chicken gizzards, chicken hearts, liver and cut bait
**Flathead Catfish**

**Nicknames:** Mud cat, yellow cat  
**Habitat:** Flatheads are found in reservoirs and big rivers, often below locks and dams  
**Preferred Water Temperature:** 78-82 degrees  
**Spawning Temperatures and Time:** 70-80 degrees; late June-July  
**Natural/Live Bait:** Live fish and minnows  
**Prepared baits:** Rarely caught on prepared baits

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**Bullheads: Black, Brown and Yellow**

**Nicknames:** Creek cats, mud cats, yellow-cats, black cats, polliwogs  
**Habitat:** Black bullheads are found in still-water streams, lakes and ponds with murky water and soft, muddy bottoms. Brown bullheads are in large, deep lakes, slow-moving streams and ponds. Yellow bullheads like clear, heavily vegetated lakes, ponds or warmwater streams. The color of the chin barbels determine the species. Yellow bullheads have yellow or white barbels; black bullheads have black barbels, and brown bullheads have brown barbels.  
**Preferred Water Temperature:** Black, 75-85 degrees; brown, 78-82 degrees; yellow, 75-80 degrees  
**Spawning Temperatures and Time:** Black, 66-70 degrees – May-June; brown, 70-75 degrees – late May and early June; and yellow, upper 60s or 70s – late spring and early summer  
**Natural/Live Bait:** Earthworms, small fish, crayfish, minnows and goldfish  
**Prepared baits:** Stink bait, blood bait, cheese bait, chicken gizzards, chicken hearts, liver and cut bait.
Prepared Baits

cheese  hearts and liver  stink baits

How to Rig

There are several ways to rig line to catch catfish. These work in both moving and still water. Prepared baits also can be used with these rigs.

swift, shallow river

Use enough weight to get bait below waterline to the bottom.

Fish can pick up bait and move off without feeling weight of sinker. Swivel acts as a stop.

deep, slow-moving river

3-way rig

Bobber with light sinker adjusted to a depth so the bait will be near the bottom.

still water

Floating jig head may be used to keep bait off bottom.
**White Crappie**

**Nicknames:** Papermouth, speckled perch, white perch, specks  
**Habitat:** White crappie are found in natural and man-made lakes, as well as large, slow-moving streams  
**Preferred Water Temperature:** 70-75 degrees  
**Spawning Temperatures and Time:** 62-65 degrees; April through mid-June  
**Natural/Live Bait:** Small minnows are the best and most commonly used live bait for crappies  
**Artificial Lures:** Jigs, small spinners, plastic/hair grubs and insect imitations

The most reliable method of separating the two is counting the dorsal fin spines. Black crappie normally have seven or eight; white crappie usually have six, but sometimes five. Color is not as dependable, but white crappie are paler, and dark spots on the sides usually are arranged in regular vertical bars. Black crappie are typically darker and have irregular spotting.

**Black Crappie**

**Nicknames:** Papermouth, speckled perch, specks  
**Habitat:** Black crappie prefer cleaner, clearer water than their white cousins. Natural lakes and reservoirs with lots of weeds are where you'll find them. They also are found in large, slow-moving rivers.  
**Preferred Temperature:** 70-75 degrees  
**Spawning Temperatures and Time:** 62-65 degrees; April through mid-June  
**Natural/Live Bait:** Small minnows  
**Artificial Lures:** Small jigs, tiny crankbaits, spinners and spoons

Crappie have a reputation as one of Arkansas’s tastiest fish. They’re also simple to catch and offer plenty of action to anglers. Both black and white crappie are found in nearly every body of warm water in Arkansas.
Crappie Habitat

Crappie Word Search

O S W E W T M S
E J P H K I V P
E I I N A S E
S T P N N D L C
E G O P E N O K
A W I E A M E S
S S W J J R R R
B L A C K S C A

BLACK SPECKS
CRAPPIE SPINNER
JIGS WEEDS
LAKE WHITE
MINNOWS
Minnows can be hooked through the back, just before the tailfin or through both lips. Try to keep your minnow alive and moving to attract bigger fish.
Artificial Lures

- curl-tail jigs
- tube jigs
- lead heads

- small crankbait
- road runner
- small spinner bait
- hair jig
- tinsel jig
- beetle
- critter jig
- slider
Trout – Coldwater Fishing at Its Finest

Arkansas is blessed with some of the finest trout fishing in America. Trout require cold water and are found on the White River below Beaver, Bull Shoals and Norfork dams. They also are found in the Little Red River, Spring River and the Little Missouri River. Trout are stocked in some Family and Community Fishing Program ponds during winter.

Rainbow Trout

Nicknames: Rainbow
Habitat: Rainbow trout are found in the main current of the stream, behind obstructions like boulders and fallen trees, vegetation and in deep holes
Preferred Water Temperature: 55-62 degrees
Spawning Temperatures and Time: 50-60 degrees; September-January, spawning is rarely successful in Arkansas
Natural/Live Bait: Earthworms, wax worms, crayfish and minnows
Artificial Lures: Spinners, jigs, artificial flies, small crankbaits, spoons and insect imitations
Prepared Baits: Whole-kernel corn, cheese, marshmallows and salmon eggs

More than 1 million trout are stocked each year in Arkansas.

Cutthroat Trout

Nicknames: Cutthroat
Habitat: Cutthroat trout are found in the main current of the stream, behind obstructions like boulders and fallen trees, vegetation and in deep holes.
Preferred Water Temperature: 55-62 degrees
Spawning Temperatures and Time: Spawning is not successful in Arkansas.
Natural/Live Bait: Earthworms, wax worms, crayfish and minnows
Artificial Lures: Spinners, jigs, artificial flies, small crankbaits, spoons and insect imitations
Prepared Baits: Whole-kernel corn, cheese, marshmallows and salmon eggs
**Brown Trout**

**Nicknames:** German Brown  
**Habitat:** Brown trout are found among the branches of submerged trees, near boulders, rock piles and deep holes  
**Preferred Water Temperature:** 60-65 degrees  
**Spawning Temperatures and Time:** 44-48 degrees; mid-October through December  
**Natural/Live Bait:** Earthworms, wax worms, crayfish and minnows, sculpins  
**Artificial Bait/Lures:** Spinners, jigs, artificial flies, small crankbaits, spoons and insect imitations  
**Prepared Baits:** Whole-kernel corn, cheese, marshmallows and salmon eggs

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**Trout Habitat**
**Natural/Live Bait**

- crayfish
- earthworms
- minnow
- insect larvae

**Grocery Bait**

- marshmallows
- corn

**Prepared Bait**

- scented bait
- salmon eggs

**Technique for Using Natural and Prepared Bait**

In some cases, bobbers are not used. A sinker can be attached 12 to 36 inches above the bait.

You can use a red plastic attractor above the bait.

Put a barrel sinker, swivel sinker or a split shot on your line

Bait can be corn, cheese, salmon eggs, redworms, wax worms or marshmallows.
Artificial Lures

- minnow bait
- marabou jig
- woolly bugger
- spoon
- in-line spinner
- tinsel jig
- sowbug
- crankbait
- inline spinner

Techniques for Artificial Baits and Lures

Fish will hit crankbait as it bumps over obstructions.

Vary retrieve by stopping occasionally after bump.

Retrieve above cover.
You don’t need a pricey rod and reel to catch fish. Many anglers do well fishing live bait with a simple cane pole with some line tied to the tip. When you’re ready to get more advanced, give the following rod-and-reel outfits a try.

**Rod-and-Reel Outfits**

**Spincast** — Called a “push-button” rod and reel. It is inexpensive, simple to use and a good outfit for beginners. Bottom-mounted spincast outfits are available, too.

**Spinning** — Called an “open-face” reel. It is a good outfit for freshwater fishing. The spool is open and the line is exposed. The reel is mounted to the bottom of the rod.

**Baitcasting** — Called a “revolving-spool” reel because, unlike spinning reels, the spool turns when the line is cast. Larger models are used to catch catfish and bass. Beginners find this outfit difficult to use and often tangle the line when casting.
**Fishing Line**
(Type and weight for each species)

**Bream**
2-lb. to 10-lb. test.

**Catfish**
6-lb. to 40-lb. test. The size of the line is based on the size of the fish you hope to catch.

**Crappie**
2-lb. to 10-lb. test.

**Trout**
2-lb. to 12-lb. test. The size of the line is based on the size of the fish you hope to catch.

**Bass**
6-lb. to 20-lb. test. The size of the line is based on cover thickness and water clarity.

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**Bobbers**
(Floats, Corks)

There are many sizes and types of bobbers. They usually are made of cork, foam, balsa or plastic.

**Tip:** Use the smallest bobber possible.

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**Tools**

A set of needle-nosed pliers or nail clippers comes in handy when fishing. Both are excellent for cutting fishing line. Pliers make it easy to unhook fish.

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**Sinkers**
(Weights)

Note: In a pinch, washers, nuts and rocks can be used as weights.

- bullet sinker
- pinch sinker
- rubbercore sinker
- split shot
- swivel sinker
- barrel/egg sinker

**Hooks**

- short-shank hook
- medium-shank hook
- long-shank hook

**Bream**
Short - to long-shanked hooks, sizes 10 to 6

**Bass**
Medium- to long-shanked hooks, sizes 4 to 3/0

**Catfish**
Medium- to long-shanked hooks, sizes 4 to 3/0

**Crappie**
Medium- to long-shanked hooks, sizes 4 to 2/0

**Trout**
Short- to long-shanked hooks, sizes 12 to 4
Knot-Tying

Tangles With Purpose
Fishing line requires special knots to hold the hook or lure securely when a fish is pulling against you. These three knots will cover any fishing situation, and are fairly easy to tie. Practice them at home, so you don’t waste fishing time trying to remember how to do it. If your knot doesn’t look right, or if your line looks worn or frayed, cut it and retie. Good fish are often lost because of bad knots.

The Fisherman’s Knot
(Improved Clinch)

Run several inches of line through the hook eye. Don’t be stingy here. Make it comfortable and easy to tie.

Wrap the loose end of your line around itself five or six times.

Pass the loose end through the loop in the line next to the eye in the hook.

Push the loose end through the new loop you just created. Moisten the knot. This will lubricate the line and make your knot easier to tighten.

Tighten the knot slowly by pulling on the line with one hand and the hook with the other.

Trim off the loose end of the line with a pair of fingernail clippers.
**Figure Eight Knot**

Insert the end of the line through the lure or hook. Bring the end back around and lay it over the standing part of the line.

Pass the end of the line under the standing part of the line. Insert it in the loop that is formed at the eye of the hook or lure. You should see the shape of the figure eight.

Holding the hook or lure in one hand, pull the standing part of the line with your other hand to secure the knot. Trim the knot, leaving about \(\frac{1}{16}\)-inch of line extending past the knot.

**Palomar Knot**

Double about 4 inches of line and pass loop through the eye.

Let the hook hang loose and tie an overhand knot in the doubled line.

Pull loop of line far enough to pass over hook, swivel, or lure.

Pull both ends of the line tight. Moisten before fully tightening. Clip off extra line.

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Make sure you know the regulations for each area you may fish. Take a look at the AGFC Fishing Guidebook and familiarize yourself with fishing regulations.
**Fishing Tips**

**Best Time to Fish**
You can catch fish any time, but they usually bite best from 30 minutes before sunrise until two or three hours after the sun is up. They get hungry again 30 minutes before sunset and bite well for about an hour or two.

**Searching for Fish**

- Cast your bait to the left.
  - Fish about 3 minutes.
  - No bite?

- Now cast in front of you.
  - Fish for 3 minutes.
  - No bite?

- Now cast to the right.
  - Fish for 3 minutes.
  - Check your bait.
Fish hide around rocks, logs and trees in the water. These are good places to cast your bait.

Fish in one spot for 10 minutes. If you don’t catch a fish, try a new spot about 25 steps away.

Keep the slack out of your line while fishing. When your bobber goes under, you may have a bite.

Move fast. Give a firm pull on the rod. Reel in steadily and drag fish to the bank with the reel. Keep the fish in the water after you catch it.
Safety Tips

Rocks can be slippery and cause you to fall.

Don’t stand or walk on logs.

Be careful with fishing hooks. Don’t hook yourself or your friends. Hook a FISH!

If your line gets snagged, cut it. Don’t yank it.

Always wear your life jacket.

Use sunblock; avoid sunburn.

Learn to recognize poison ivy and poison oak.

Dispose of trash properly. A broken bottle or jagged can could spoil someone’s fishing trip.
Dressing a Fish

Always have an adult help you pan dress and cook your fish.

1. Use a spoon or scaler. Hold the tail firmly and scrape the scales off, always working away from you. Use short strokes scaling tail to head.

2. Remove the fish's head by cutting across the back and behind the fins on each side of the fish.

3. Cut off the bottom front fins and remove any remaining organs.

4. Rinse the fish with fresh water, then put on ice.

Fried Fish

Ingredients
3 pounds fish
2 cups cornmeal
1 cup flour
2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon paprika or black pepper (or both)
½ teaspoon red pepper (optional)

Instructions
Soak fish in slightly salty water 30 minutes to one hour before frying. Drain and rinse. Mix ingredients completely. Roll fish in meal mixture. Drop carefully into vegetable oil heated to 350-375 degrees. Fry until fish flakes easily with a fork.
Want Reel Family Fun?

Visit your local Family and Community Fishing Program destination.

Stocking Hotline
(866) 540-FISH (3474)

Where, when and what the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission is stocking.