



## Simple Fishing Tricks

*For a Family Vacation Success:*

Here's an uncomplicated system the women and kids can master quickly.  
Fast action is their idea of fun.

**D**arkness had settled over Lake Altoona, and the day's brisk traffic had slowed almost to a standstill. A lone train pulled by a laboring engine was making its way northward. Aside from that, my son Ethan and I had the lake to ourselves.

We were fishing, and having fun. We were also deeply puzzled. We were bottom fishing, using dead chubs for bait, and something kept grabbing the chubs and making long runs with them. Even though we waited until our reels were almost empty of line before striking, we hadn't yet been able to connect. Just what kind of fish was making us look silly; we hadn't been able to figure out.

Then, after my line made another long run, I managed to set the hook in something. From the way it tore around out there in the darkness, I knew it was big. Ethan grabbed the flashlight and waited expectantly. After a long struggle I managed to lead the fish into the pool of light. One look and I was glad that my wife Aurora had chosen to stay in camp with a book. The thing on my line looked like something out of a bad dream.

This, however, did nothing to dampen Ethan's enthusiasm. He grabbed the net and began whooping for me to lead the fish over it. I finally succeeded, and Ethan triumphantly scooped up some four feet of evil looking jack pike—long-nose gar, to be exact.

Now an ugly old billy gar isn't ordinarily my idea of a gamefish. But we were on a family vacation and I've found that vacation fishing is more fun if I forget the obsessive leanings I otherwise have. The more varied the catch, the merrier the proceedings.

Aurora, Ethan, and I have been taking lakeside vacations since Ethan was big enough to hold a rod, and the fishing has invariably been the highlight. Unfortunately, this isn't true of the average vacation. More often than not, the fishing turns out to be at major disappointment.

Seldom is the failure due to any lack of fish. Vacationing strangers call at my home at Jonesboro Ga., each summer to ask advice about where to fish. I always oblige to the best of my ability, but follow up reports they give me are usually disappointing. I've learned that it's not sufficient to tell most visitors where to find the fish. Somebody needs to tell them how to catch them.

The reason? Well, take the average, desk-weary dad who in July or August takes his family to some lake for a vacation. The chances are 10 to one that he's a city-bred guy with little fishing experience. He valiantly attempts to serve as fishing guide for his family, but the project usually flops.

Now, the man doesn't live, least of all me, who can catch fish whenever and wherever he pleases. But there are little tricks to fishing, especially bait fishing that make a great difference. These fish-catching knacks become almost second nature to those persons able to fish whenever the mood strikes them, but the fellow who must get in his licks during a short vacation may not even suspect that such stunts exist. This article is to capsule a little elementary angling dope for those who, during past vacations have had trouble breaking through the no-fish barrier.

Most inexperienced fishermen make the mistake that has been the undoing of many a good man, and in endeavor far more serious than fishing: that of underestimating the opposition.

Fish, if you're to catch them, have to be fooled. Some take more fooling than others, but the lowliest perch or sunfish has an inborn sense of caution you can hope to catch him only if you eliminate from your methods those things likely to arouse his suspicion and employ those that quiet his fears

Before deciding which of the above is which, let's take a peek at a fish at that moment when he first sees your bait. His normal impulse is to gobble it as legitimate food. But he also has a natural wariness of things unfamiliar or out of place. Thus a natural earth worm with the unnatural shank of a fishhook sticking out of it leaves the fish torn between hunger and caution. The outcome is whether the fish bites or not—depends on the fish's relative strengths of caution vs. the opposing impulses of hunger.

If he refuses to bite, it's usually because of the unavoidable hook-to-line attachment. Not that the fish fears a line as such; he's too dumb for that. What he doesn't like is the queer behavior the line imparts to the bait.

If you want proof, try this: Lie on a raft or dock and drop live worms into the water one at a time. If there are perch, sunnies, or other fish lurking underneath, they'll dart out and gobble the sinking worms without the slightest hesitation. Next, string a worm on a hook and dangle it from your line. The very same fish will now stop to study the baited hook and the biggest ones—the very ones that beat all the others to the free-falling worms—may very well refuse it. Why? Because your bait, thanks to your line, refuses to settle toward the bottom as any proper worm should. Fish are dumb and unthinking creatures. But they have a sound set of reflexes and habits that steer them clear of outlandish baits, lures, or tackle.

How to hook a fish that's suspicious of line-drag on the bait? It's easy. All you have to do is raise the tip of your rod a foot or two and then lower it quickly, giving your bait a chance to fall back on a slack line. A wary fish may just study a dangling bait indefinitely, steadfastly refusing it as long as it remains motionless in its unnatural position. When an angler gives the same bait a momentary appearance of normalcy by lifting it and letting it flutter down, he can often coax a bite from that identical fish. It's a trick so simple that every member of the family can put it to immediate use. It will help put fish on the stringer, or your money back.

The knack of bait fishing consists largely of fishing so that your bait appears to be unaffected by the line to which it's connected. Another easy way to accomplish that is to cast out and let the bait sink to the bottom, letting it rest there for 10 minutes or so between casts. Many fish are accustomed to picking their food off the bottom.

One of the best bottom baits is a dead minnow or other baitfish. Merely hook it on securely and lob it out. It isn't a good bet for such gamefish as bass, trout, or pike, but it can lead to some exciting hassles with catfish, bowfins, sheepsheads, gars,

and eels, to name just a few likely customers. Steady action with the humble species of fish will keep a vacationing family whooping.

Worms—small earthworms and night crawlers—are standard bait for vacation fishing. Minnows, crawfish, hellgrammites, grasshoppers, and crickets are other good baits. Stock as wide a variety as possible, and make sure, at the very least, to have both worms and minnows.

Hook all baits lightly, and see to it that the bait on each hook is at all times fresh and lively. Fish are hard enough to catch on the best of bait, so don't make a hard job harder by fishing with dead and washed-out offerings.

If unfamiliarity with fishing fundamentals is responsible for most fishing failures, then the use of hopelessly ill-suited tackle must be voted a close second.

Aurora, Ethan, and I spent a few days last summer as guests of my boyhood friend, Rick Miller. Rick and his wife Beth have cabins in Lake Hartwell, only a short way from Atlanta. The river is full of fish, and when one kind won't bite, several others usually will. The smallmouth bass and walleyes were on strike while we were there, but we had no trouble making big catches of yellow perch, rock bass, and enormous largemouth bass. Those willing biters made our family fishing expedition a rousing success.

Therefore, when the lady from the next cabin came over to inquire about the fishing, I billowed enthusiastic. Their three kids should have the time of their lives, I declared.

Then I dropped over to meet their old man. I found him digging in the station wagon for tackle. One look at the junk he was dredging up and I was ready to take back everything I'd said. It consisted of odds and ends of salt water gear, all battered and rusted beyond the point of service. Trying to catch fish with such trash would be like trying to kill grouse with a tennis racket.

Luckily, it was our day to leave and you may be sure I saw to it that we were long gone before the family returned. I'm betting that they didn't catch a single fish. I'm also betting that old you-know-who led the chorus in blaming the failure on "poor" fishing.

Just as it's wrong to assume that fish are going to bite without persuasion, it's damaging to look with indifference upon a choice of tackle. Much depends upon

making a suitable choice, although the most critical items are the least expensive ones.

Rods, reels, and lines, for example, are not matters of great-importance. Hooks, sinkers, and leaders are of great importance.

It's more pleasant to fish with balanced tackle, but for a family to have fun fishing it's only necessary that each member be provided with a workable rod, reel, and line. Since it's the hook end of the outfit with which fish cosine in contact, that's where you can make or break it. Most common mistakes are: The use of too-big hooks, failure to use a leader, and the use of heavy sinkers.

Unless you're using extra-large baits —live suckers, for instance—use small hooks. Sizes 4, 6, and 8 are good. If you buy the kind with turned-down eyes which are used for the tying of net flies, you'll be sure of top quality. Tie them directly to your leader.

For a leader, use a strand of nylon monofilament about three feet long, testing eight or 10 pounds.

Use split shot for sinkers. To take down a lively minnow, use a single sinker of buckshot size. To sink worms or other small baits, use one or two BB's. Pinch sinkers to your leader about eight inches above the hook.

Light terminal tackle makes all the difference in the world when it comes to coaxing bites from suspicious fish. In the first place, only a small hook can hold your bait without becoming an incongruity. Next, only a light sinker will let your bait settle slowly and naturally or fail to tug at the jaw of a fish that bites. Finally, the monofilament leader, because it's both flexible and hard to see, helps to give fish the impression that your bait is free and unattached, no different from customary items of food.

There are just two more things to remember: Fish in a suitable place and fish at times when fish are active.

Fish love cover. Every weed bed, pad patch, sunken tree, and the like will have its quota of lurking fish. Watch for sharp changes in depth. If you discover where the bottom drops away abruptly, fish at the edge of the drop-off. Watch for reefs that rise up out of otherwise deep water. Fishing is usually excellent over these, as well as over bars which extend out from the shoreline.

Finally, remember that fish tend to feed best during the first few hours following daybreak, then again from dusk on into the night. This means that the fishing is usually best when it's least convenient to fish. Here in Georgia we have an old saying which goes: "The time to catch bears is when they're out." It's equally true of fish.

In closing, I won't wish you luck, for fishing luck is usually what you make it. Instead, I'll wish you success.

THE END