



All about Fishing Lures

By: Ramon J. Ross

An illustrated guide to basic types of lures: how they work, what they're designed to attract and catch.

The purpose of lures is to get fish to strike them. Without lures or natural bait, a fish would dismiss a hook as just one more piece of underwater debris.

But to a fish, the hooks are probably not even seen in its interest in the lure and what it represents.

Of course, no one can really know what a fish thinks, how it sees underwater and what it looks for as it searches for food. Indeed, the various species of fish require different foods, thus requiring markedly different lures for all styles of fishing.

Trout take a Light Cahill fly because it looks like a mayfly, pike, a gurgling topwater plug that resembles an injured frog, bass pick up a plastic worm that imitates the real thing, coastal striped bass hit a white bucktail that looks and acts like a shiner minnow, and marlin rap their bills at vinyl squid skipped in the wake of an offshore fishing boat.

In all of the above cases, fish strike at the lure because it resembles natural bait. In some cases, fish will hit at lures just to get them out of the way or because of anger. One of the techniques of experienced early season bass and bluegill fishermen is to throw a lure repeatedly over a spawning bed to provoke fish into striking the lure to get it away from their nest. Similarly, a fish that misses a lure the first time can often be teased into striking a second time by retrieving faster, changing lures to a different type, color or size, or by varying the action of the retrieve.

The Beginning

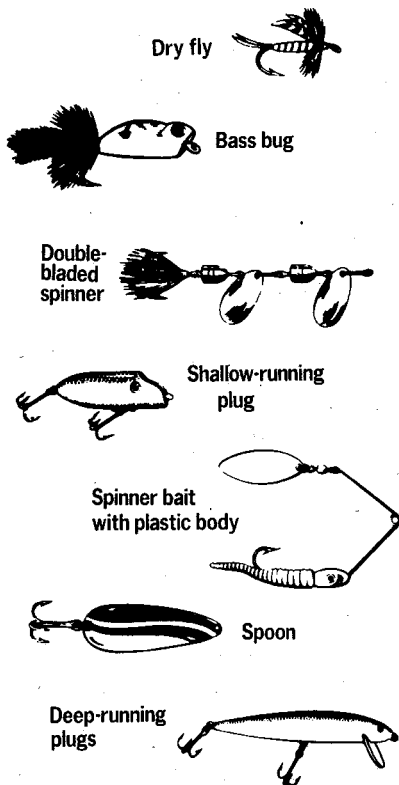
Flies similar to the ones used on today's trout streams can be found in Aelian's "Natural History, A.D. 200," and much later on in "The Treatise Of Fishing With An Angle," by Dame Juliana Berners, 1496.

The evolution of artificial lures to represent other than natural aquatic and terrestrial insects came much later and is mostly an American development. Legend has it that bass plugs as we know them developed from a whittler seeing a bass hit a chunk of wood thrown into a Michigan river, and that a spoon from a picnic set dropped overboard on a lake outing and hit immediately by a fish, led another early angler to manufacture fishing spoons.

Spinners, in a variety of unusual styles, were developed in Europe. In the 1940's, they made their way here to the U.S. for use with the then new spinning tackle that could effectively cast these small, lightweight lures.

Other lures such as the spinnerbaits of today's bass fishermen, soft plastic lures and worms, have been developed or modified more recently or resulted from modern technological or manufacturing methods which continue today to play an important role in lure development.

Selection



When buying fishing lures, the three musts to consider are the fish, the fishing area, and the tackle. First, consider the fish. If you are after largemouth bass, for example, choose those lures that will imitate the size and type of food that bass eat. Bass will hit a wide variety of lures including topwater plugs, shallow and deep-running plugs, spinnerbaits, spinners, spoons, plastic worms, jigs, and flyrod lures.

Consider also the fishing water. Ponds, large deep reservoirs, small streams, and wide fast rivers all vary in the type of water, the type and amount of protective fish cover, and available food. Deep-running lures would get snagged in shallow water, while topwater lures are seldom successful in open deep water.

Cover for bass is also important. The weeds of many shallow waters require weedless spoons, spinnerbaits, or plastic worms rigged with buried hook points to avoid

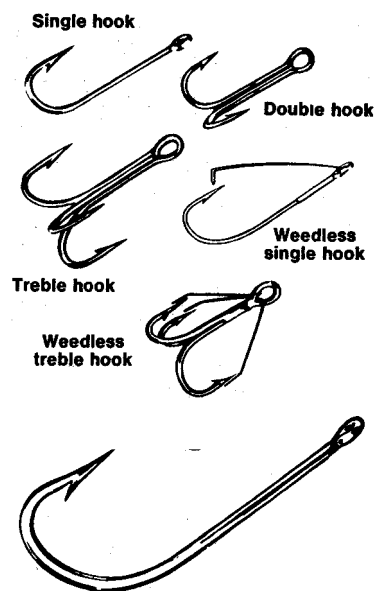
constant snags.

Similarly, working deep creek channels, stumps, and rockpiles of the man-made reservoirs requires deep-diving plugs, jigs, and weighted plastic worms to get to the bottom and the fish.

Lures must be matched to the tackle. Flyrod bass bugs can't be cast with a spinning outfit, light spinners won't go far with a heavy casting outfit and large 5/8 -ounce bass plugs will strain the rod and line of an ultralight spincast outfit. The same care in lure selection must be taken with each kind of fish and type of fishing. In some waters where a variety of fish are stocked, it is impossible to know what will hit a lure. In this case, pick lures for the fishing waters, and for the varieties of fish found there.

Construction

The automatic lathes that once turned out wood bass plugs have been largely replaced today by plastic-injection molding machines that turn out both solid and hollow plastic plugs. Plastics are most commonly used in plugs since they can be made hollow to float, with sound cavities to hold rattles, can be molded around metal bills, lips, wiggle plates and other hardware.

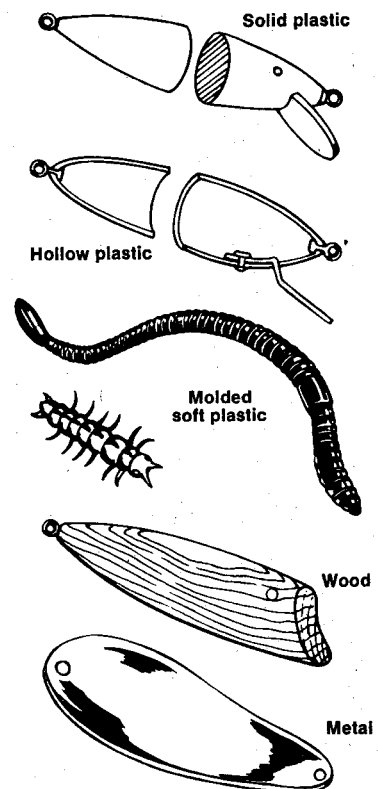


Plastic worms and soft plastic lures are molded from a material that leaves the lure as flexible as live bait.

Modern stamping machines turn out the spinner blades and spoon blanks needed for these lures-almost all of which incorporate complex curves to create a dodging, darting, lifelike action in the water.

All lures are designed around hooks. There are three types of hooks-single, double and treble. Single hooks have a single point on the end of a bend, a shank which connects the hook point and bend to an eye by which the hook is attached to the line or leader or lure.

Double hooks have two points on two separate bends, both attached to a single shank and ending in a single eye. Some double hooks have two parallel shanks extending from a single eye like a



cotter pin so that the hook can be added to or removed from a lure or hook hanger. Treble hooks have three points and bends attached to a single shank and eye.

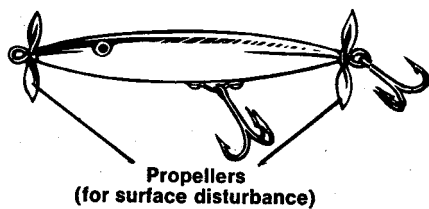
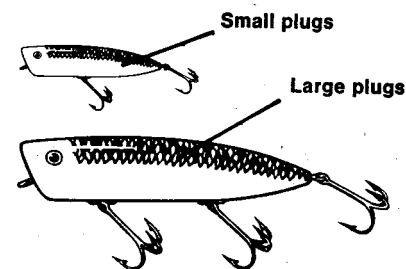
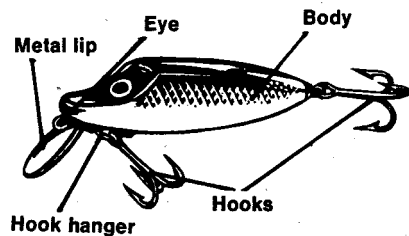
Hooks used on saltwater lures are often of thicker wire and are plated or made of stainless steel to prevent corrosion.

Weedless hooks prevent hooks from becoming snagged by the addition of a small light wire running from the eye and protecting the hook point.

Basic Design

Plugs are three-dimensional lures which run on top or through the water and generally resemble minnows, baitfish, crayfish, injured mice, frogs or other fish food.

All have an eye at the front for attaching the line or leader, and several eyes or hook hangers to hold hooks. Treble hooks are most commonly used, although some plugs have single or double hooks.



Plugs vary greatly in size and weight since they are used for such a wide variety of fresh and saltwater fish. Most freshwater plugs range between 3/16 ounce and 3/4 ounce, although plugs as small as 1/8 ounce and as large as three or more ounces are made. Size runs from as short as one inch to as large as seven or eight inches, the latter mostly for salt water.

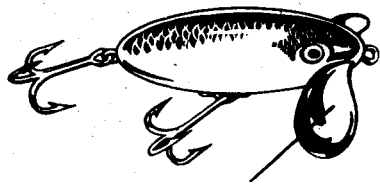
Almost all fishing plugs come in an artist's palette of colors and finishes. Most finishes today are imbedded into the plastic which forms the plug body. Wood plugs are still made, however, and have painted finishes.

Some plugs have head plates, wiggle lips-or bills molded in or attached to the front end. On topwater plugs, these attachments add to the noise and disturbance they make on the water, while bills on underwater plugs cause the lures to dive and swim to different depths. Some plugs come in jointed

styles, with the joint adding action to the lure.

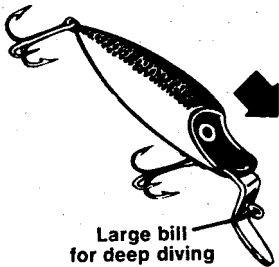
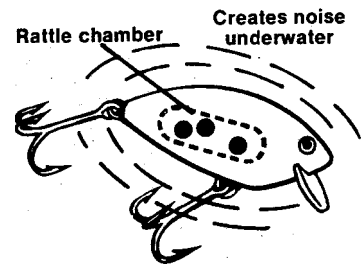
Other additions to plugs to make them even more fishlike are patterned, scalelike finishes that resemble the scales of fish, smells that can be added to plastic lures to attract fish and rattle chambers with built-in rattles to create noise as the plug is retrieved.

Types of Plugs



Lip of plug
(for surface disturbance)

Topwater plugs float and almost always make a splash or create a disturbance on the surface to attract fish. Surface disturbances are created by the shape of the plug, the design of the plug head, various plates, lips or other attachments. Some surface lures have no



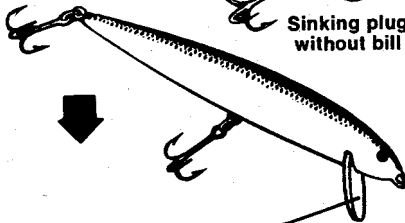
Large bill
for deep diving

plates or lips; they are worked silently.



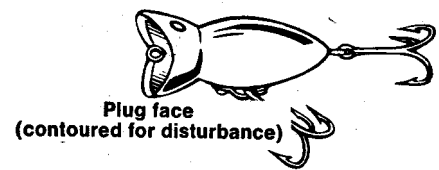
Sinking plug
without bill

There is a fine line between surface lures which work exclusively on the surface and floating-diving plugs which float but dive on retrieve. Short slanting bills on the front, or slope-face heads cause them to run several feet deep. Depth depends on rate of retrieve and type of lure.

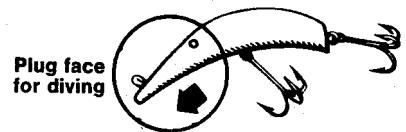


Sinking plug with
bill for action

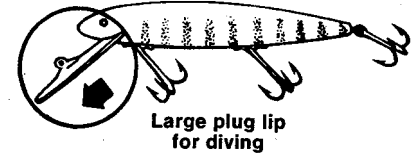
Many deep-diving lures also float, but the large bills on the front cause them to run very deep. Also, the same brand of deep-divers in different sizes will run different depths. Usually small floating deep-diving plugs will run shallower than large plugs.



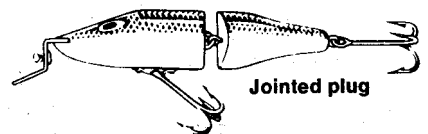
Plug face
(contoured for disturbance)



Plug face
for diving



Large plug lip
for diving



Jointed plug

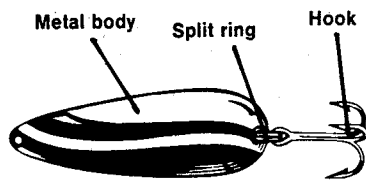
Some deep-running plugs have a flat sunfish shape. They vibrate rapidly in the water and create a noise like a swimming minnow.

Sinking plugs allow the angler to fish any depth within reason. They are often small, and they usually have large lips to keep them down during the retrieve. Since they sink, many anglers use a "counting" method to fish them for schooling fish. Seconds are counted as the lure sinks, and the count is varied with each cast. Once fish are hit, each subsequent cast is made with the same count.

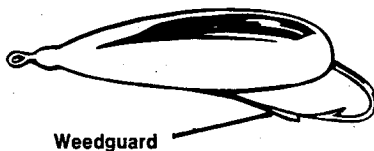
Plugs were originally designed for bass although today the vast number of styles, sizes and finishes makes them ideal for any fish in fresh or saltwater that will hit a moving bait. Casting, spinning and spincast tackle are all used with plugs.

Spoons

Most fishing spoons have a slender shape and, like other lures, come in a wide variety of sizes, colors, finishes, and hook arrangements. The typical fishing spoon is a long tapered blank of heavy metal to which is attached a treble hook by means of a split ring (like a key ring) or welded ring. Some spoons also have a second metal ring or hook attached to the concave surface of the spoon blank. A weed-guard or guards over the hook prevents the spoon from hanging up.



Typical fishing spoon



Weedguard



Thin spoon for trolling



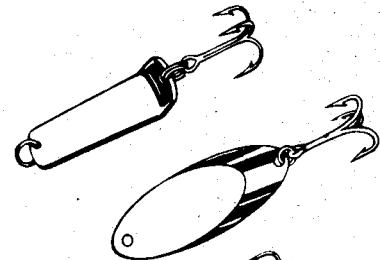
Heavy spoon for casting

Spoons with this same a single hook arrangement are also used in trolling. Some trolling spoons are made paper thin for trolling behind sinkers, while casting spoons come in both standard and heavy styles.

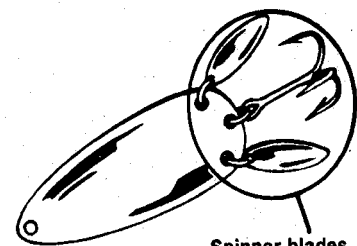
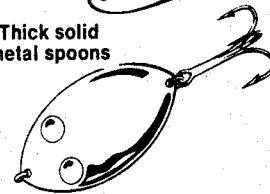
Most spoons come in a multitude of colors and metal finishes, and prism like reflective surfaces. For added attraction, some have spinner blades attached by small rings to the edges of the blank.

Sizes range from one to 12 inches. Virtually all species of fish will hit spoons, but they are particularly good for pike, bass, trout, coho salmon and saltwater fish.

Spinning, casting and surf-fishing tackle will all cast spoons, depending upon their size, while trolling spoons may be used with heavy casting tackle or saltwater boat equipment.



Thick solid metal spoons



Spinner blades for attraction

Spinners

Spinners are lures consisting of a blade attached to a central shaft by a U-shaped clevis or other device that allows the blade to spin around the shaft as the lure is retrieved, thus the name. Behind the blade, beads and/or bodies of brass, painted metals add to the flash of the lure and its intended effect of attracting fish. An eye in the upper end of the shaft serves to tie the line; an eye at the lower end holds the hook. In most cases treble hooks are used, but a few lures use double or heavy single hooks. Skirts of rubber, fur, or feathers, short lengths of colored tubing on

the hook shank and small bits of bright plastic placed on the hook add to the attractiveness of spinners.

Aside from this basic design there are innumerable complex variations of spinners that include double blades and offset shafts to reduce twisted line.

June-bug spinners are designed to be used with bait on a long-shank single hook. The blade on this type of spinner has an angled arm that rotates on the shaft to keep the blade permanently flared out from the body.

There are many variations of spinner blade shape, type; sizes, finishes and colors. The beads and body shapes used on the shafts are also too numerable to classify.

Spinners range from one-inch, 1/16-ounce lures to large, long heavy lures over one ounce in weight. Some spinners with built-in soft plastic minnows are longer and heavier. Spinning tackle is ideal for casting spinners.

The small sizes are ideal for stream smallmouths, panfish of all types and trout. Larger sizes are used for muskies, bass, pike and some saltwater species.

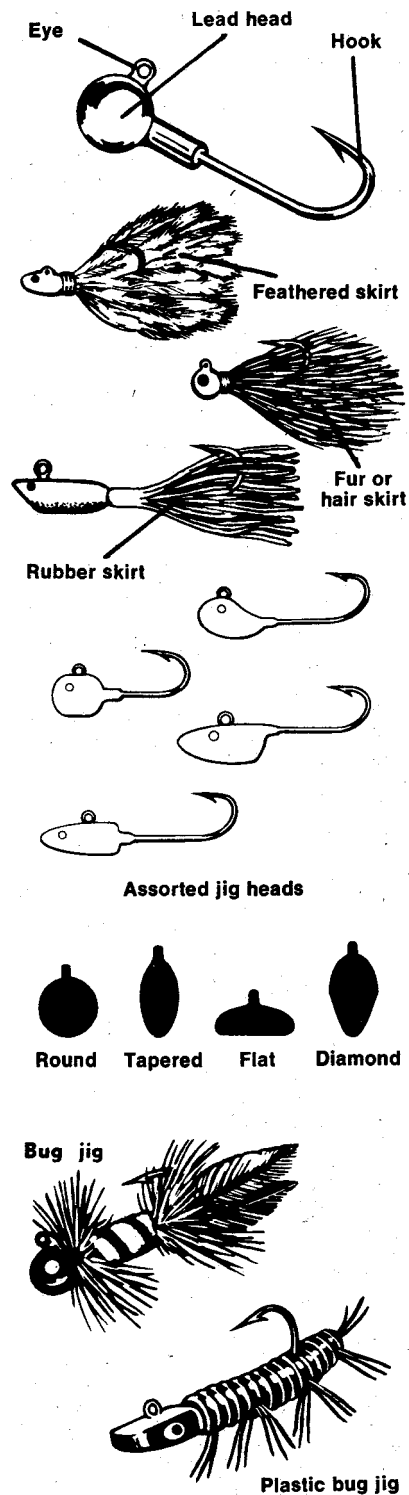
Jigs

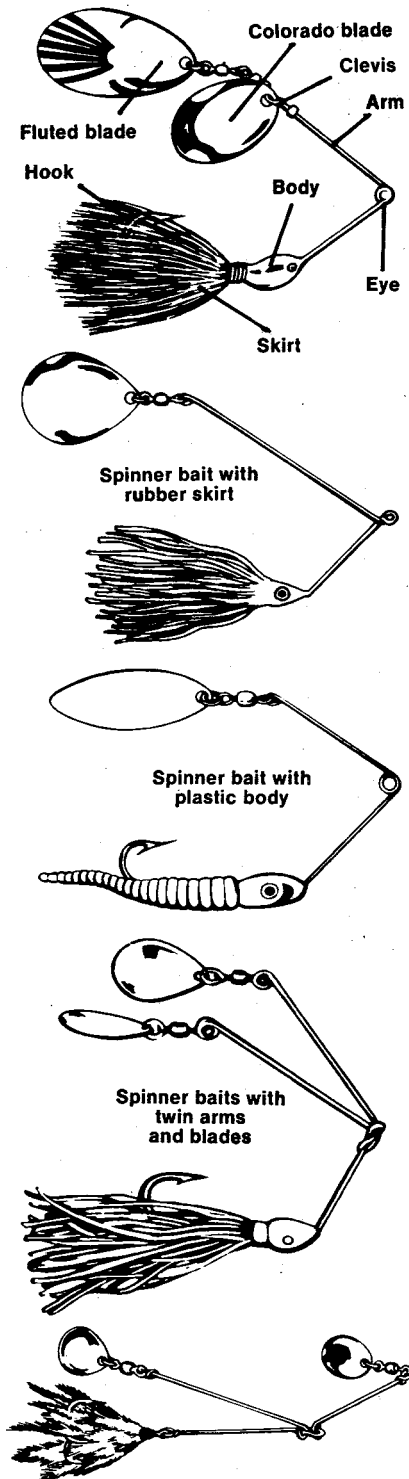
Jigs are typically single-hook lures consisting of a lead body molded around a special jig hook with feathers, fur or imitation fur tied on as a skirt or tail. The lead head of the jig is painted, often the same color as the skirt or tail material, or plated in jewelry-like reflective finishes.

Since jigs have no action of their own when retrieved as do spinners, spoons and plugs, they must be worked by the angler using the rod and speed of retrieve.

Jigs are worked up and down in a short rapid action called jiggging. This action causes them to resemble an injured minnow or bait, hopping erratically through the water.

While jigs might seem very simple, there are several basic styles, each with a special purpose. Tapered-head jigs cast well, sink rapidly and are ideal for the casting fisherman.





For deep jigging—a fresh and saltwater technique that involves dropping a jig to the bottom and working it up and down—a jig with a flat diamond shape will sink quicker than one with a rounded, bug-eye or chunky shape.

Wide, flat bonefish jig heads keep these lures from digging into the mud, and they slow the sink rate enough to allow the lure to be hopped along in front of the fish.

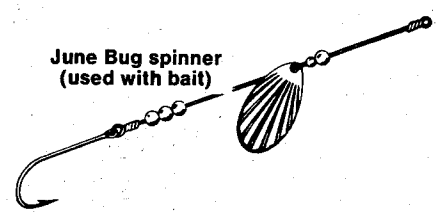
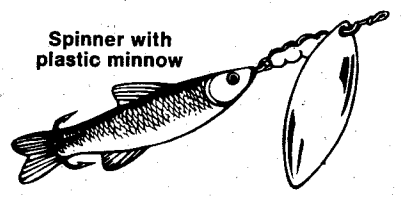
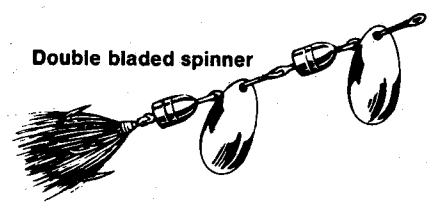
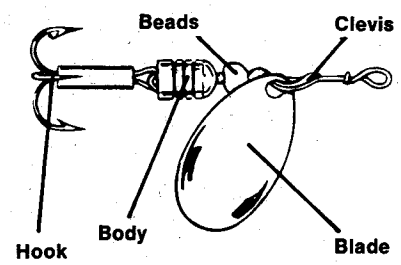
In addition to simple skirts tied on to the shank of the jig hook or the collar of the jig head, some roundhead jigs are tied with bodies of chenille and hackle to further simulate bait or food.

Jigs range from 1/32 ounce to five ounces or more. The larger ones are mostly used in saltwater. Jigs are fished with spinning, casting, spincast and surf tackle. They are ideal for virtually all saltwater and most freshwater species.

Spinner Baits

Add the blades of a spinner to a basic jig and you have a spinnerbait -

one of the top lures in recent years for largemouth bass. Spinnerbait styles have been around a long time, but modifications and innovations make them seem only a few



years old.

The spinner part of these lures is attached to a safety-pin-shaped arm molded in the front of the jig head. The line is tied to the eye at the bend of the safety-pin arm and not to the jig head itself. Extending from the arm or arms, are spinner blades, in some cases, the spinner blade is attached by a U-shaped clevis, as with spinners, while in other cases it is attached by means of a swivel at the end of the wire arm.

Some spinnerbaits have one spinner blade, many have more. Those with two or three blades may have them in line on a single wire that lies over the top of the jig body and hook; or they may be attached at the end of both arms extending from the eye.

The jig bodies on spinnerbaits often have rubber or plastic skirts. Sometimes they are equipped with a single or split soft plastic tail for additional attraction.

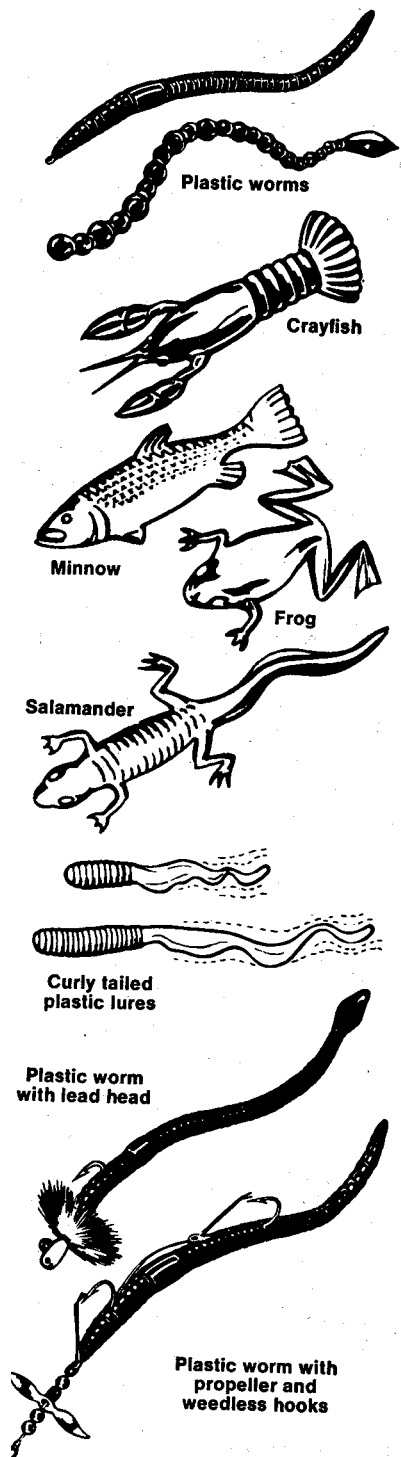
Spinnerbaits range in weight from 1/8 ounce to 3/4 ounce. They come in dozens of colors and head-skirt color combinations. Spinnerbaits are usually specifically designed for bass, although they will take other large freshwater fish and, in light sizes, panfish. Baitcasting, heavy spinning or spincast tackle is required to fish them.

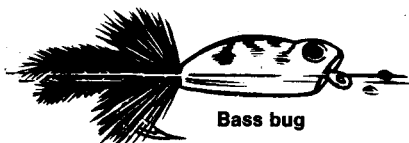
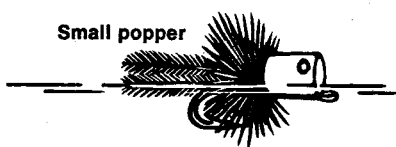
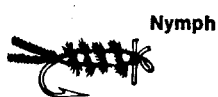
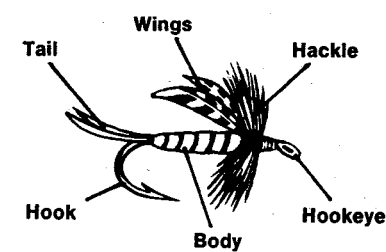
Soft Plastic Lures

Plastic worms and other soft plastic lures have been popular since the late 1940's for a number of gamefish, especially largemouth bass.

While plastic worms in all sizes, shapes and colors remain the most popular lures, soft plastic crayfish, frogs, minnows, salamanders, grub tails, spinnerbait tails and curly tailed lures that ripple in the water also have their followers.

Soft plastic lures are molded from liquid plastic with the degree of softness and flotation controlled in manufacturing. Scents can also be molded into these lures.





While plastic worms come in one-inch sizes on up through 15-inch sizes, the most common worms are six to nine inches.

Most worms and some other plastic lures come unriggered: i.e., without hooks. But they can also be purchased with built-in hooks. Usually these include a leader with a spinner blade and a few colorful beads for additional attraction.

The plasticizers used in these lures to keep them soft can be harmful to hard plastic lures, to the plastic in older tackle boxes and to the finish on some painted spoons, jigs and plugs. Quality tackle boxes and plugs, however, are plastic worm proof.

If doubtful of soft plastic/hard plastic reactions, keep soft plastic lures in plastic bags. Most plastic lures are fished alone without other attractors, but often with a lead weight to aid in casting. Both spinning and casting tackle are used. Grub tails and spinnerbait tails are added to jig heads and spinnerbaits for added attraction.

Flies

Flies come in several styles including dry flies, wet flies, nymphs, streamers, bucktails, and bass and panfish bugs. In addition, there are specialized flies for steelhead and for saltwater species such as tarpon, bonefish, striped bass, mackerel and others.

Dry flies, as the name indicates, are tied on lightweight hooks so they will float on the surface and imitate floating insects. These flies are tied with stiff hackle feathers (from birds) wound perpendicularly around the neck of the fly and tied in as a tail at the end of the hook shank to support the fly on the water.

Wet flies imitate terrestrial insects such as beetles, crickets or aquatic insects that have drowned and are drifting downstream as potential food. They sink and are tied with

hackle and wings flared back.

Nymphs represent the larval or nymphal form of aquatic insects. They are tied much more exactly than wet flies and often incorporate legs, wing cases, abdomens and gills.

Streamers and bucktails are tied on long-shank hooks to imitate baitfish. Bucktails are tied with bucktail or other fur wing material, while streamers refer to all long, minnow-like flies, or just to those with feather wings.

Bass and panfish bugs are similar except for size. Panfish bugs are smaller, but both have floating cork, balsa, or plastic bodies, and fur or feather tails. They are used the same way as popping topwater plugs, but are cast with fly rods.

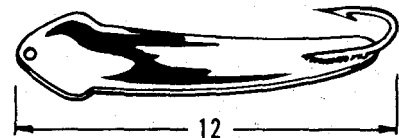
Saltwater flies are usually large, simple, and highly-visible, with bright colored wings. They imitate baitfish in the sea. Some special variations include small bonefish flies tied with the wing to cover the hook point and to ride upside down; large sparsely hackled tarpon flies; and long eel-like flies for barracuda and similar southern fish.

Saltwater Special Lures

Just as spinnerbaits and spinners are almost exclusively freshwater lures, some lures are confined almost exclusively to salt water.

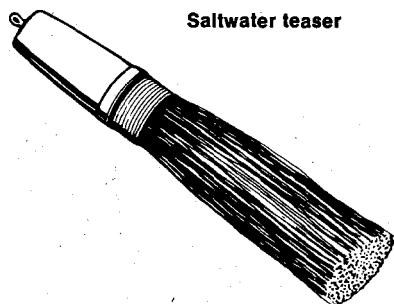
Teasers may not be exactly considered lures, since they are large, skirted "plugs" used primarily to "tease" large saltwater fish such as marlin to the surface where they hopefully will find the bait skipping in the boat's wake.

But teasers are made so that they can be rigged with a hook and trolled from an outrigger using a rod and reel. In this case, they are fishing lures in every sense of the word.



Large trolling spoon

While most spoons used in saltwater and freshwater are designed to be cast, there are some large, single-hook trolling spoons that range in size up to 12 inches or more.



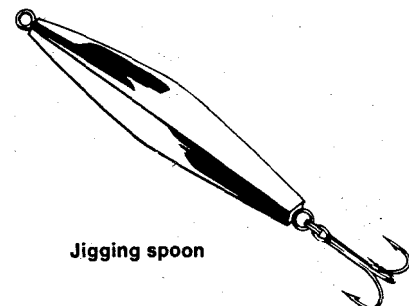
Saltwater teaser

Conversely, there are also "jigging spoons" that were originally designed for deep jigging, but are now cast in the surf, and used at the end of deep-water fishing rigs for bottom species. These are made of thick, heavy metal and have little action of their own in the water. They really come under a category separate from

Spoons which wobble when retrieved.

Tin squids, molded of block tin and used in the surf, are similar lures, although they can be bent to create some action in the water.

Vinyl-skirted trolling rigs are almost exclusively the province of the saltwater angler. They consist of a tapered, one-piece



Jigging spoon

molded vinyl skirt which is attached to a weighted head. They also come unrigged to be used as regional preferences dictate.

Through-wire construction or comparable design in plugs incorporates a wire or plate to which the "line eye" and all hooks are connected to prevent a lost fish if the plug is destroyed.



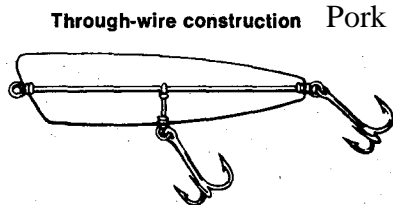
Tin squid

Tough, transparent plastic plugs with reflective inserts are used in shallow areas along all coastlines to simulate frightened baitfish.

Specials and Unusual Lures

With the hundreds of gamefish in the country and thousands of lure types, there are always some lures which defy classification.

Bass fishermen today are using small lead and heavy metal lures usually fitted with two treble hooks and one or more spinner blades. These small lures are fished deep and usually worked in a hopping action similar to that used for jigs, although the spinner blade does create flash in the lure.



Through-wire construction

Pork rind-strips and chunks-is made from pig skin and is an artificial lure in that it is packed in preservative, and is used either by itself on a hook, or is attached to spoons, spinnerbaits, and jigs to add to the attraction of these lures.

Ice-fishing lures look like spoons or small jigs and in reality combine both. They are often a tiny spoon or spinner blade weighted with lead and painted brightly.

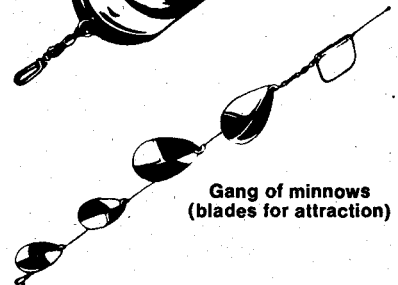
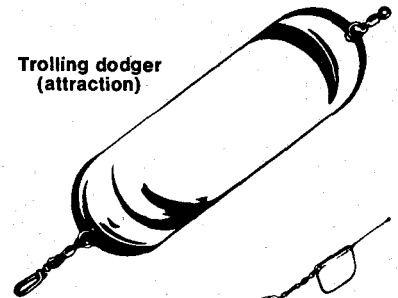
Some spoons are also used without hooks. These are the spoon-like trolling dodgers used on the West Coast and Great Lakes for salmon. They are tied to a line, after which a leader is tied ending with a large bright trolling fly. The dodger attracts the fish, the fly hooks the fish.



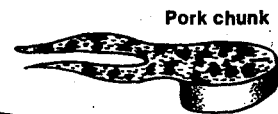
Ice fishing lures



Trolling dodger (attraction)



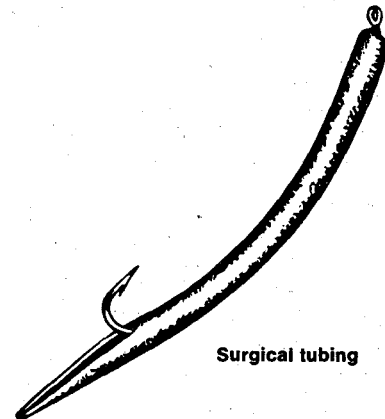
Gang of minnows (blades for attraction)



Pork chunk



Pork strip



Surgical tubing

Similar spoon and spinner-blade arrangements are three to five-foot strings of a half dozen to a dozen spinner blades ending with one at the end fitted with a hook.

Surgical and similar plastic tubing is used for lures. They range from tiny two-inch bright mackerel rigs used on the Coast, to long 10 to 18-inch surgical-tube lures rigged with a single hook and designed for striped bass in the North, barracuda on the Florida Flats.

