

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Fishing Is Fun for Everyone

*It's Easy to Learn How*



## Getting Started

Fishing is fun—just ask any of the 50 million children and adults in America who now enjoy the sport! Better yet, try it yourself—you can quickly learn to fish at any age. Fishing is not just about fish—during a fishing trip, families and friends relax together as they enjoy being outdoors and learning new skills.

Here's what you'll need to fish in freshwater:

- An inexpensive fishing rod and reel
- 4- to 8-pound-test monofilament fishing line
- A package of fishing weights
- Fish hooks (Number 6–10 size)
- A plastic or wood bobber
- A selection of live bait or fishing lures
- A casting plug
- A state fishing license (depending on your age)

You'll find everything you need at a fishing tackle or sporting goods store. Many discount or hardware stores also sell fishing tackle. If you want to fish in saltwater, ask for help in selecting the right equipment.

While you're in the store, ask about a fishing license. Depending on your age and your state, you may need one to fish legally. Also pick up a copy of your state's fishing laws (or regulations), which will tell you the types of fish, the minimum size limit, and the number of fish you can catch in one day.

Then, choose a fishing rod that you can hold comfortably in one hand. There are many inexpensive combination packages available that include a rod, reel, and fishing line. Tie a hook to the end of the line with a fishing knot. Instructions for the Palomar or the Improved Clinch knot are on page 3 of this pamphlet.

## What Tackle Can I Use?

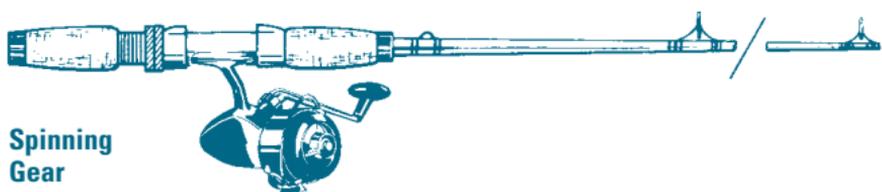
With spincasting or spinning tackle, you can put the bait or lure where the fish are. You can cast greater distances with more accuracy, work lures effectively, fish in deeper water, and handle larger fish more easily with this tackle.

Spincasting outfits use a rod with a pistol-like grip and a reel that's mounted on top of the rod's handle. Line is released using a push button on the reel.

**Spincasting  
Outfit**



**Spinning  
Gear**

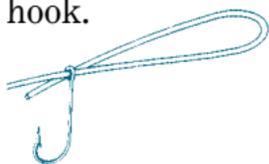


Spinning gear uses a rod with a straight handle and a reel that's mounted under the handle. Line is released using your index finger.

For most beginners, spincasting and spinning are two fishing methods that can be learned quickly. Both spincast and spinning tackle are available in packages that contain a rod matched with a reel that is already spooled with fishing line. Buy the best equipment that you can afford—all will work well, but look for better quality pieces with more features.

## The Palomar Knot

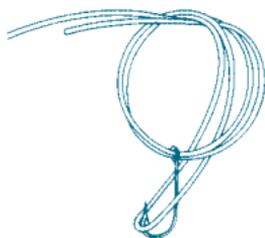
Double 4 inches of line and pass the loop formed through the eye of the fishing hook.



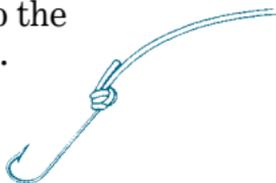
Let the hook hang loose. Tie an overhand knot in doubled line. Don't twist or tighten line.



Pull the loop far enough to pass it completely over the hook.



Wet the line. Hold the hook carefully, and pull the loose end with the standing line slowly to tighten the knot. Clip the loose end.



## The Improved Clinch Knot

Pass line through the hook eye and, with the tag end, make 5 turns around the standing line. Insert the loose end of the line between eye and first loop formed. Bring the end through the large second loop formed.



Wet the line and tighten the knot slowly while holding the loose end of the line end between thumb and index finger so the knot is partly closed before it's secured against the eye. Clip the loose end of the line.



## How Can I Learn to Cast?

Practice. Once you've selected a spincasting or spinning outfit, use either the Palomar or Improved Clinch Knot to tie on an inexpensive rubber covered weight called a casting plug. Ask your dealer to suggest one, or buy one that fits the size of your fishing rod.

Next, find an area away from other people where you can practice casting without breaking a window or hurting someone. Make sure you set your reel's drag properly by checking the instructions that came with the reel. Now follow the steps for your type of rod that are shown on the next two pages.

Don't be discouraged if your first casts don't go exactly where you want them to. No matter what type of fishing tackle you use, the timing of your arm and hand movements is critical for long, accurate casts. You will improve with practice—keep trying!



## Spincasting

A spincasting reel has a button that you push with your thumb to release the line.



1. Grasp the rod's pistol grip with one hand. Push the reel's thumb button down and hold it in.



2. Face the target area with body turned at a slight angle, about a quarter turn. Aim the rod tip toward the target, about level with your eyes.



3. Swiftly and smoothly, bend your arm at the elbow, raising your hand with the rod until it almost reaches eye level. When the rod is almost straight up and down, it will be bent back by the weight of the practice plug. As the rod bends, move your forearm forward with a slight wrist movement.



4. When the rod reaches eye level, release the thumb button.

### *How did you do?*

If the plug landed close in front of you, you released the thumb button too late. If the plug went more or less straight up, you released the thumb button too soon.



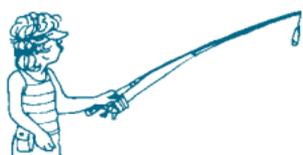
## Spinning

With a spinning reel, you use your finger to release the line.



1.

1. Grasp the rod's handle, placing the reel "stem" that attaches the reel to the rod between your middle fingers. Place your thumb on top of the handle and extend your forefinger to touch the spool cover. With the other hand, rotate the reel spool until the line roller is directly beneath your extended index finger. Pick up line in front of the roller with your index finger and open the reel's bail with your other hand.



2.

2. Face the target area with body turned at a slight angle—about a quarter turn. The arm holding the rod handle should be closest to the target. Aim the rod tip toward the target at about eye level.



3.

3. Swiftly and smoothly, using just one motion, bend your casting arm at the elbow and raise your forearm so that your hand is almost at eye level.



4.

4. When the rod is almost straight up and down, it will be bent by the weight of the practice plug. As the rod bends, move your forearm forward with a slight wrist movement.



5.

5. When the rod reaches eye level, straighten your forefinger to release the line.

*How did you do?*

If the plug landed close in front of you, you straightened out your index finger to release the line too late. If the plug went more or less straight up or behind you, you straightened your index finger too soon.

## Hook, Line, and Sinker



Worm



Minnow



Crayfish

Now that you've learned your knots and how to cast, you are ready to set up your rod with hook, line, and sinker. Cut off the casting plug and tie on a hook using either the Palomar or Improved Clinch Knot. Attach 1 or 2 sinkers or fishing weights to the line, 6 to 12 inches above the hook. This weight will keep your bait or lure down in the water and will help swing it away from shore.

For a beginner, live natural bait such as worms, minnows, crickets, and other insects is a good option. A few shovels full of dirt in your backyard will often provide enough worms. If you can't dig your own, you can find them in a sporting goods or bait shop.

If you want to use minnows, catch them in or near the waters you want to fish. This prevents bringing new diseases or fish species into a river, lake, or stream. Return leftover bait fish to where you caught them.



Spoon Spinnerbait



Crankbait Spinner Jig

Fishing lures—crankbaits, spoons, jigs, spinners, flies, and soft lures like plastic worms—are excellent artificial baits but may require special fishing techniques. This is called “working” the lure.

A bobber lets you know when fish are biting, because it moves up and down in the water as fish nibble at the bait. You can make a bobber from a cork, or buy an inexpensive plastic one. The narrow cork and quill bobber made from balsa wood or plastic is more sensitive to fish movement.



Bobbers

Most bobbers attach to fishing line with a spring clip and move up and down the line easily, depending on how deep you want to fish the bait.

## **What about Accessories?**

A tackle box will store the variety of lures, hooks, snap swivels, weights, tools like pliers and wire cutters, and other gear. You might also need a live bait container (such as a minnow bucket or a worm box), a stringer or an ice chest to keep your catch fresh, a landing net, rod-and-reel cases and a first-aid kit for minor emergencies. Other handy items include a scaler, hook disgorger, tape measure and scale, and a filet knife.

## **Safety First!**

- Fish with a companion who can offer help in an emergency
- Be careful when handling sharp hooks
- Don't cast near other people, and always look around before making a cast.
- Wear a Coast Guard approved personal flotation device or life vest when wading or in a boat.

## **Practice Conservation**

A good angler respects our natural resources and wants to conserve them for others to enjoy. Always carry out what you brought in—never leave behind plastic containers or packaging. Fishing line is very dangerous to birds and other wildlife, tangling around legs or the mouth. Bring old or tangled fishing line to a fishing tackle store to recycle it.

## **Catch and Release**

Fish should never be wasted. If you catch a fish that is under the legal or minimum size or that you do not want to keep, release it quickly. If possible, keep the fish in the water and handle it carefully, pushing the hook back through the lip. If the fish has swallowed the hook, do not tear the hook out. Simply cut the line as close to the mouth as possible. You can revive a fish by gently moving it back and forth in the water so that water runs through its gills. When it begins to struggle and can swim normally, let it go.

## Go Fish!

Look for a weedy or rocky area where the water is several feet deep. Avoid shallow water that doesn't offer fish a hiding place. Look for areas where the bottom changes in some way—from sand to gravel or from sand to mud. Stay quiet and avoid disturbing the water or you may scare fish away.



**Bluegill**

Next, bait your hook or tie on a lure. If you use a worm, thread the worm from one end. Once stuck on, it will slide around easily. If you find fish stealing too much bait without getting caught, try using a smaller worm or switch to a smaller hook. If you use a minnow, hook the bait through both lips.



**Bass**

Swing the bait or lure as far from shore as you can and watch the bobber. Small panfish will nibble at the bait, causing a slight movement and a small circle of ripples around the bobber. When a fish has the bait, it will probably try to swim away, pulling the bobber under the water. When a fish bites, raise the tip of the rod quickly to set the hook and reel your catch in. Steer the fish away from thick weeds or submerged branches.



**Trout**

Panfish, such as bluegill or perch, bite almost any time of day. If you have no action after 10 or 15 minutes, move to another likely spot and try again. For other types of fish, such as trout or bass, you may want to fish early in the morning or in the late afternoon.



## Where Can You Go to Fish?

There are many sources of information on where and how to fish. Fishing is regulated by each state government, so try looking on state Internet home pages or call 1-800-ASK-FISH for fishing information available by phone. Most states have an aquatic resource education program that teaches fishing skills along with conservation education. Here are some places to look:

- State Fish and Wildlife Conservation Agencies
- State Departments of Natural Resources
- Recreation and Tourism Agencies
- State Parks
- County and Local Government Agencies
- Chambers of Commerce
- Fishing tackle and sporting goods stores
- Fishing clubs

Here are a few Internet Websites that may be of interest:

- [www.gofishing.org](http://www.gofishing.org)
- [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov)
- [www.restorewildlife.org](http://www.restorewildlife.org)
- [www.asafishing.org](http://www.asafishing.org)
- [www.sso.org/iafwa/documents/state\\_fish\\_and\\_wildlife\\_director.htm](http://www.sso.org/iafwa/documents/state_fish_and_wildlife_director.htm)



## Angler Dollars for Conservation

Each time you pick up your fishing rod, you are helping make fishing better. Every purchase of fishing tackle, from the smallest weight to the biggest salt water rod, carries a tax that goes from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to state fish and wildlife agencies for fisheries research, habitat improvement, aquatic resource education programs, and fishing and boating access. This user-pay/user-benefit system has been in place since 1950, and has quietly cleaned up rivers and streams, restored fish populations, and created public access to waterways.



**Anglers keeping outdoor traditions alive since 1950**

**U.S. Department of the Interior  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
1 800/334 WILD  
<http://fishing.fws.gov>**



This beginners guide to fishing was made possible by a partnership between the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the American Sportfishing Association, and National Fishing Week.

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1999 revision by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service