

Cook Wild Kentucky

A Beginner's Guide to Fishing in Kentucky

Kentucky offers some of the best fishing chances around. Among our rolling hills, you will find over 62,000 miles of fishable streams and 40 public lakes. Fishing is fun for all ages, and prime fishing spots can be found year-round across the state. Anglers take to the water each year for fun or food. Kentucky is home to bass, catfish, trout, sunfish, and more.

Fish is part of a healthy diet. It is a great source of protein and is low in saturated fat. Fish is also a great source of omega-3 fatty acids. This healthy fat is linked to reducing heart disease. One way to serve fish is fried, but it can also be grilled, baked, or broiled. Cook all fish to 145 degrees Fahrenheit. The texture will appear flaky. Use a calibrated metal-stem thermometer to check the temperature.

Proper Handling

Fish must be handled in the right way to maintain quality and ensure safety. Whether you buy fresh fish from a grocery store or catch it on your own, basic food safety rules should be followed. A fresh catch should be cleaned and cooled quickly to prevent bacterial growth and off-flavors. In the field, have a cooler with ice or freezer packs ready to keep fish at 40 degrees Fahrenheit or below during transport. Fresh fish should be stored in a covered container in the refrigerator and eaten within two days. If it will not be eaten within two days, the fish should be frozen. Frozen fish should be kept frozen until you are ready to cook. For best quality, fish should be thawed in the refrigerator or under cool running water before cooking. Do not thaw fish at room temperature on the counter.

Filleting fresh fish can be intimidating. Necessary tools for the job include:

- A sharp fillet knife. It should be the right size for the fish. A medium-sized knife has a nine-inch blade.

- A cut-resistant glove. This protection is useful, as fish are hard to hold while filleting.
- A properly cleaned and disinfected cutting board that is large enough to fit the size of the fish.
- A bowl of ice-cold water to hold the fillets. Some add salt to this water, as it can aid in leaching out any blood from the fillets.

Other tools, such as a fillet board with a clamp, a pair of skinning pliers, a scaling knife, throwaway gloves, and a pair of tweezers for lifting missed bones, can all prove useful.

Gear Selection

There are very few pieces of equipment that an angler truly needs to get started. A beginner will need a spincast or "push-button" reel and a medium-weight, fast-action rod. Choose a rod length that fits you. A taller person should select a rod in the six- to seven-foot range. A shorter person would most likely choose a five- to six-foot rod.



Spincast or push-button reel. (Photo by Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)

Choosing the right line is much like picking out a rod and reel: many options are available, and everything seems to have a specific purpose. Monofilament is a great all-around fishing line for beginners. Select a line with a poundage rating that is appropriate for the type of fish you hope to catch. For smaller fish, such as bluegill or sunfish, choose a line rated for four to six pounds. For larger fish, such as bass or catfish, choose something a little more robust, such as an eight- to ten-pound line. Six-pound monofilament line is a great all-around, all-species choice.



The label on a six-foot, medium-weight fishing pole that includes line weight recommendations and lure weight recommendations. (Photo by Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)



Eight-pound monofilament line. (Photo by Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)

Next choose your type of tackle. The tried-and-true method of a hook, worm, and bobber will catch most kinds of fish in Kentucky. For hooks, a size 2 Aberdeen is a good choice.



An Aberdeen hook is a style of fishing hook that has a long, straight shank and a single barb on the hook point. The smaller sizes make them right for almost any fish. (Photo by Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)

If a sinker is needed, start with a size 5 split-shot sinker weight. If more weight is needed for casting or holding a bait, simply add more sinkers to the line.



Split-shot sinkers. (Photo by Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)

A classic red-and-white, clip-on bobber completes your set-up. The bobber size should match the size of fish you hope to catch.



Red-and-White, Clip-On Bobber. (Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)

Nightcrawlers, red worms, or mill worms are great all-around choices for live bait. If you wish to use artificial bait, try an in-line spinner. An in-line spinner weighing between one-eighth ounce and one-quarter ounce in white, yellow, or pink targets most kinds of fish found in Kentucky.



In-line spinner. (Photo by Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)

Preservation

Fish can be preserved by freezing or canning in a pressure canner. Freezing is the most common method and by far the easiest. Choose bags and plastic containers labeled for freezing. Regular storage bags and containers are not thick enough to guard from freezer burn. When freezing, remove as much air as possible from the package. Vacuum sealing is best. Great results

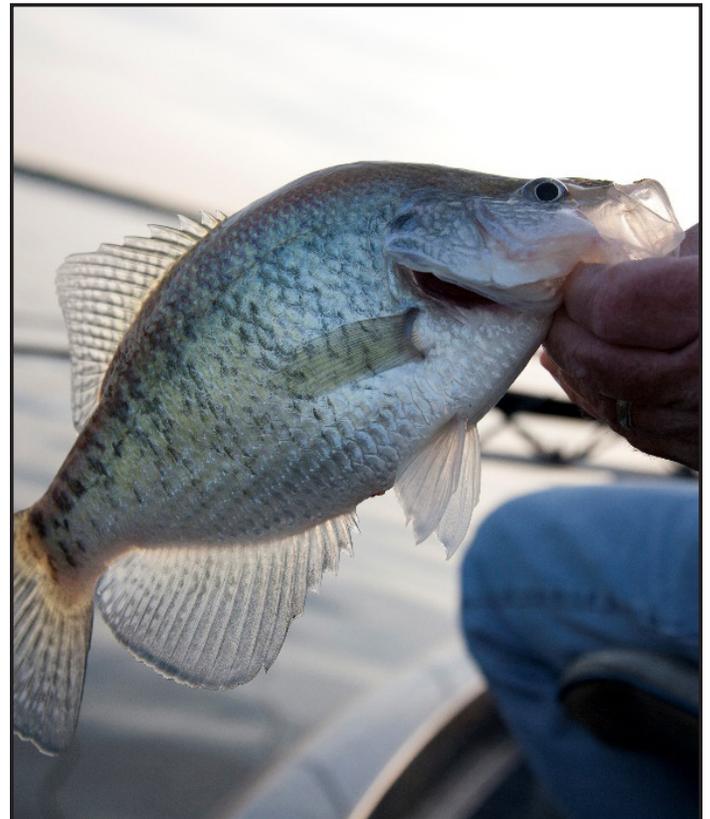
can also be gained by wrapping fish tightly in plastic wrap and storing it in freezer bags or freezing it in water. Full details on freezing and pressure canning can be found in the following publications: Home Freezing Basics (FCS3-334) and Home Canning Meat, Poultry, Wild Game and Fish (FCS3-585). Both publications are available at your local county extension office.

More Resources

A valid fishing license and any applicable permits are required for those ages 16 and older who are not otherwise exempt. For more information on fishing in Kentucky and the required licenses and permits, visit the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife website at fw.ky.gov. For information about fish consumption advisories, check the most recent Kentucky Fishing and Boating Guide and the website information published by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources at

<https://fw.ky.gov/Fish/Pages/Fish-Consumption-Advisories.aspx>.

Popular Kentucky Species



White crappie (*Pomoxis annularis*) are common statewide in streams, rivers, and reservoirs. They are stocked throughout the state in reservoirs, where they associate with brush piles, standing timber, rock ledges, and other cover. (Photo by Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)



Redear sunfish (*Lepomis microlophus*) have an orange or red margin on the black gill or "ear" flap. Cast near submerged stumps, logs, brush, and other aquatic vegetation in the backwaters or side channels of streams and rivers for a chance at catching one of these unique fish. (Photo by Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)



While **white bass** (*Morone chrysops*) occupy the main channels or rivers and most major reservoirs across the state, they are commonly targeted during the spring spawning runs in some rivers (e.g., Salt, Dix, and Big South Fork of the Cumberland rivers). (Photo by Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)



Rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) are stocked for sport fishing in the coolest creeks, streams, rivers, and reservoirs across the state. (Photo by Chase Winger)



Bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*) are common and abundant throughout the state. The adults can grow to 16 inches (4.5 pounds), but they typically reach between six and 11 inches. (Photo by Chase Wininger)



Black crappie (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*) occur statewide in habitats similar to white crappie, but they tend to be more abundant in natural lakes and reservoirs with clearer water. (Photo by Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)



Channel catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*) are common statewide in medium-sized streams to large rivers and are routinely stocked in ponds and reservoirs throughout the state. Adults can grow to about four feet (60 pounds), but typically range from 12 to 32 inches (one to 15 pounds). (Photo by Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources)

Oven-Fried Fish Fillets

Servings: 4

Serving Size: 4 ounces

Ingredients

- 1 pound fish fillets
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1/4 cup Parmesan cheese, shredded
- 1/4 teaspoon dill weed
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 2 cups cornflake-type cereal, crushed

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Cut fillets into serving pieces, if necessary. In a small bowl, combine lemon juice and vegetable oil. In a separate small bowl, mix Parmesan cheese, dill weed, salt, and pepper. Dip each fillet into lemon juice mixture. Lay in baking dish, sprinkle with cheese mixture, and coat with crushed cereal. Bake uncovered for 20 to 30 minutes or until fish flakes easily.

Nutrition facts per serving: 200 calories; 6g fat; 1g saturated fat; 0g trans fat; 80mg cholesterol; 330mg sodium; 12g carbohydrate; 0g dietary fiber; 1g total sugars; 0g added sugar; 24g protein; 6% Daily Value of vitamin D; 8% Daily Value of calcium; 35% Daily Value of iron; 10% Daily Value of potassium.

Adapted from "Fish and Game Cookbook" (2013) by Bonnie Scott.

Baked Fish Fillets with Dill Sauce

Servings: 4

Serving Size: 4 ounces

Ingredients

- 1 pound freshwater fish
 - 1 tablespoon lemon juice
 - 1 teaspoon water
 - 1/2 teaspoon pepper
 - 1 small onion, diced
- For dill sauce:
- 1/4 cup low-fat mayonnaise
 - 1/4 cup fat-free milk
 - 1 tablespoon dried dill weed
 - 1 tablespoon lemon juice
 - 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

Directions

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit. Coat a 9-by-13-inch baking dish with nonstick cooking spray. Place the fish in a single layer in the baking dish. Sprinkle the fish with lemon juice, water, pepper, and onion. Cover tightly with foil. Bake 20-25 minutes until internal temperature reaches 145 degrees Fahrenheit.

To make dill sauce, place mayonnaise in a saucepan. Gradually whisk in milk. Whisk over medium-low heat for 2 minutes, or until smooth and heated through but not bubbly. Remove sauce from heat. Stir in dill weed, lemon juice and Dijon mustard. Remove fish to a serving platter. Spoon dill sauce over fish and serve.

Nutrition facts per serving: 200 calories; 6g fat; 1g saturated fat; 0g trans fat; 80mg cholesterol; 330mg sodium; 12g carbohydrate; 12g; 0g dietary fiber; 1g total sugars; 0g added sugar; 24g protein; 6% Daily Value of vitamin D; 8% Daily Value of calcium; 35% Daily Value of iron; 10% Daily Value of potassium.

Catch of the Day Burger

Servings: 6

Ingredients

- 1 quart boiling water
- 1 1/2 pounds boneless white fish
- 3 eggs, beaten
- 1/3 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped, or 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1/2 cup dry panko breadcrumbs
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- 6 whole-wheat buns, toasted
- 1/8 cup tartar sauce (optional)

Directions

Bring 1 quart of water to a boil. Place fish fillets in boiling water. Cover and return to boil. Immediately lower heat and simmer for 7 to 10 minutes or until fish flakes apart easily with a fork. Drain and flake fish. In a bowl, mix beaten eggs, cheese, parsley, garlic or garlic powder, salt, and pepper together. Combine with fish. Stir just until blended. Chill in refrigerator for at least 1 hour. Shape chilled mixture into 6 patties and roll in breadcrumbs. Heat oil in skillet over medium heat. Carefully place fish patties in pan. Cook the patties for 3 minutes on each side or until browned, turning only once. Drain on paper towels. Serve on toasted buns. Add tartar sauce, if desired. (Note: Adding tartar sauce will increase sodium.)

Nutrition facts per serving: 520 calories; 23g total fat; 5g saturated fat; 0g trans fat; 150mg cholesterol; 710mg sodium; 41 g total carbohydrate; 0g dietary fiber; 5g total sugars; 0g added sugars; 36g protein; 10% Daily Value of vitamin D; 15% Daily Value of calcium; 15% Daily Value of iron; 8% Daily Value of potassium.

Adapted from "Fish and Game Cookbook" (2013) by Bonnie Scott.

Catfish Fillets

Servings: 6

Serving Size: 4 ounces

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 pounds catfish steaks, about 1-inch thick
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 8 ounces fresh white mushrooms
- 3 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
- 1/4 cup white wine vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
- 1 green onion, thinly sliced

Directions

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Mix olive oil, garlic, mushrooms, soy sauce, vinegar, and ginger in a bowl. Place fish in a shallow, greased baking dish. Pour mushroom mixture evenly over fish. Pull foil around baking pan and seal tightly. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes or until fish flakes easily. Add thinly sliced green onions on top of fish before serving.

Nutrition facts per serving: 270 calories; 17g total fat; 4g saturated fat; 0g trans fat; 65mg cholesterol; 340mg sodium; 2g total carbohydrate; 0g dietary fiber; 1g total sugars; 0 g added sugars; 25g protein; 50% Daily Value of vitamin D; 0% Daily Value of calcium; 0% Daily Value of iron; 10% Daily Value of potassium.

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