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NOW ANYONE



CAN CATCH FISH

New developments have made this sport ideal for beginners, even the lady of the house and the kids

By ERWIN A. BAUER

LAST SUMMER my neighbor and I took five small boys on a fishing trip to Michigan. It was the first expedition for three of them, but all caught fish.

One of the beginners was my own 11-year-old son. He has only average coordination for his age, but after about 30 minutes of instruction with the modern, inexpensive tackle, he learned to cast well enough to catch fish.

SPORTS

"Daddy," he said one evening, "I'm an expert already!"

That wasn't exactly the case—but he was on his way to becoming a good fisherman. Until recently, only men went fishing, and it required years to attain any skill. Not so now. *Anybody* can enjoy fishing, thanks to new equipment, better transportation, and good conservation.

The equipment breakthrough came just after World War II with a method called spinning or spin-casting. By any name, it's an easy, near-foolproof way to cast a bait. It differed from previous methods in that the line pulled off the end of the reel spool instead of unwinding. This eliminated the backlashes which had always been troublesome. Now anyone could learn to spin-cast, even before he went fishing, with a few practice sessions in the back yard. At the same time, the old lures hanging in sporting-goods stores were replaced by plastic worms, crickets, and crawfish which anglers could scarcely tell from the real McCoy.

Still other factors have entered the picture in recent years. New lakes designed for flood control or power could also be stocked with fish. Better still, science has discovered how to produce more fish per acre of water. And most of the regulations and closed seasons which once confused fishermen have been eliminated.

As a professional angler, I'm often asked to reveal my "secrets." The truth is I have no secrets—just some tips. If a beginner will follow them, he'll have a fine time.

My first tip is to learn to cast at home using back-yard "targets" (such as paper plates). This can become a lively family competition as well as good practice. Most manufacturers provide casting instructions with their tackle.

I should point out, too, that a prospective fisherman can obtain a free fishing education just by visiting his local sporting-goods store. Most major tackle companies, as well as boat and motor manufacturers, provide fishing instructions adapted especially for local conditions.

MOST OF THE game fish in America (such as trout, bass, pike, catfish, pan fish) live around "edges" rather than in deep, open water; my second tip would be to concentrate in such places. By "edge," I mean beside a weed bed, below and above a falls or rapids, around a reef or shoal, just off a rocky point, or around the edge of the lake itself. In salt water, look for flocks of birds (usually gulls or terns) wheeling and diving over a bit of water. You'll find fish beneath them. But in fresh water or salt, keep your lure or bait behaving in a lively, lifelike manner.

Except very early and late in the season, most fish are more active and more likely to strike early and late in the day. Do your most serious fishing at these times. Remember, too, that good weather does not necessarily mean good fishing, nor vice versa.

One of the best tips is to follow the advice of the outdoor or fishing columnist in your local newspaper. This man keeps up to date on where and how fishing is best. He can tell you what lures are currently effective, for example.

If a boat is available, one of the most effective ways to fish is by trolling. That means pulling a lure at a distance behind the boat. Trollers should remember to go very slowly and travel parallel and close to the "edge."

Whether the method is casting or trolling, move about until fish are located. Then concentrate at the spot as long as you get action. Above all, be flexible. Try new places, baits, techniques, and various depths.

By the way, on that weekend fishing trip, the inevitable happened: both my sons caught bigger bass than I did. "Shake hands with the new champ," one said.

The other added: "Next time you watch how we do it." That's what I like so much about family fishing nowadays. You can't lose.