

Starting Lure Fishing

Contributed by Leebu

Why fish with lures? Two main reasons: Fun and food. Lure fishing has a number of advantages for the novice and experienced angler alike. Chief among them is that the majority of edible species in British waters are predators, and can therefore be caught on lures.

Trout, pike, grayling, perch even salmon (though frankly you'd be lucky!) can and will take different lures. In fact the only two exceptions would probably be carp and eels- generally you won't take these on lures. To my mind though this is a small price to pay. It is also more convenient than, say, dead baiting. The kit required can be streamlined to set up at home and put in the back of the car, then be fishing within minutes of hitting the bank. It makes shorter sessions of fishing possible, and productive. This also makes good sense as fish tend to feed at better at certain times of the day (dusk and dawn are always good). As a novice, I found this far more convenient and interesting than sat out behind a rod and reel in one spot all day. Finally, lure fishing is a little more forgiving of the beginner. It's as complicated as you want to make it. Study watercraft, feeding behaviour, lure patterns and technique if you want, but anyone can catch with a spinner and a bit of luck. It also takes the hassle out of 'striking' with a lure the hooks pretty much set themselves most of the time. I don't suppose there is a reason why anyone can't pick up a rod and start fishing, especially if the only reason you are doing it is for the pot. But some basic knowledge of angling is vital if you intend to return the fish, and this will account for most people. I would say that at the very least, anglers should be able to tackle up, tie a good strong fishing knot, cast out and know how to unhook a fish safely. With these basics, anyone can lure fish if they take a little care. Basic Equipment for Lure Fishing The below are essential: Rod - any will do for a beginner, but shorter is probably better (around 5-9 ft). Casting weight up to about 20g if you want to get technical. Reel - Again any will do, expensive doesn't mean better. The spool needs to be deep enough to hold fairly thick line. Fishing line - 12lb mono at least. Likelihood of catching a pike this heavy isn't huge for novices but you never know. You need to be able to get any fish in quickly and relatively safely. Playing around with lighter line is asking for trouble for a beginner, as you will lose tackle to snags, underwater features and trees on the other side of the bank very easily at first. Worst if your tackle breaks while playing a fish it isn't just a lure that's lost, it may mean a fish swimming around with a mouth full of hook and lure, and probably a slow and unpleasant death. It's not worth the risk of fishing light. I specify mono (nylon line) as well for the beginner as it's far cheaper than braid if less strong- it's also more forgiving as it has a little stretch in it, meaning less fish lost for the novice. Wire traces - these attach to the line and then to the lure. A pike's teeth are sharp enough to cut through the strongest braid and mono so these are essential. Forceps - used to unhook fish. A long (6-8 inch) and short (4 inch) pair are useful to deal with fish with different size mouths. Despite their ferocity pike won't try and bite you deliberately, however if you are not careful they may flap and struggle suddenly and their teeth really are very sharp- you don't want your hands in there unless you can help it! Forceps grip the hook and allow you to disgorge it firmly. Wire-cutters/ pliers - Sometimes a fish may have a hook lodged awkwardly or stuck through its gill flap. Any attempt to release the hook may lead to serious damage to the fish, so it is better to cut off the hook than drag it back through the fish. Obviously if you are going to eat the fish this is fairly immaterial, but not all fish you catch will be suitable for eating. Priest - Or something similar i.e. something solid and weighty for administering a sharp knock on the head to your fish (or nosy anglers who don't like you eating your catch). Landing net - Needs to be at least two feet in diameter, with an adjustable handle. For landing the fish safely and easily. Sharp knife - For all manner of angling-type jobs. Bag - For carrying equipment and, of course, your day's catch! Hope, after all, springs eternal. It sounds a lot but apart from the landing net and rod, the above will fit in a small bag quite easily, enabling you to roam freely up and down the river bank looking very professional! Another tip is to get a good multi-tool, as these have pliers, wire cutters, a blade and will also double up as a blunt instrument, saving even more space. Lures Frankly this could fill a book in itself, as there are so many different types of lures out there that cover a multitude of uses. I am embarrassed to admit to have become something of a lure buying junky recently, so be warned. I'm through that now, luckily, just taking it one day at a time…. Seriously though, the truth is that for absolute beginners, it is best to start with two types of lure: spinners and spoons (far right of picture below). Both are very simple to use and fairly easy to cast and retrieve. They are metal (predominantly) and work more by simulating the flashing of scales and vibrations given off by fish in distress rather than by looking much like an actual fish. I would recommend lures of no more than 20g or 6 inches in length to begin with. Patterns (i.e. colours) are various and usually aim to simulate natural prey fish e.g. roach, perch, jack pike or trout. The truth is that fish have been caught on all manner of different coloured lures. My own personal favourite pattern as an all rounder is the basic silver and red. That's as much down to personal taste as empirical evidence though! It always pays to have a variety of patterns just in case. Generally, the darker the water, the brighter your lures should be. In the case of plugs (left of picture below) and other 'life-like' lures, they can be great but they often need a little more working to get the full benefit (twitching, zigzagging, different speeds etc) so experiment, but buy cheap ones to begin with- you'll go through a few! Most lures tell you what they do (deep diving, sinking, neutral buoyancy, surface etc) and it isn't rocket science to work out whether they are suitable for the water you will fish. One tip I would give- many lures have three hooks on them. My feeling is that if you can't get your hand around a lure between the hooks, lose the middle one- they will be a nightmare to remove in a smaller fish's mouth. And no matter what lure you get, crimp the barbs down on the hooks. A pair of pliers will do the job and the five minutes you spend doing this will be paid back ten fold if you get a hook in your landing net/ jumper/ finger/ friends cheek. The amount of fish lost due to barbless hooks is minimal, believe me. The amount of trips to casualty because of them is rather higher. For more lures than you ever could hope to use check out: www.thelureshack.com My favourites and most consistent overall are the spinnerbaits - bizarre, v-shaped lures (top of picture below) but effective and easy to unhook. Also shads are popular and effective.

These are rubber-bodied lures (middle of picture below) that wriggle underwater when retrieved. The jack pike pattern is an excellent one for those interested in catching pike (they are, like a lot of predators, cannibalistic and territorial). Both of these are excellent beginner's lures as they work on a steady retrieve and need little extra working. The spinnerbaits are also fairly effective in weedy areas, as they won't snag as often as ordinary spinners. Weeds= fish! Or lost lures. That's the gamble unfortunately. Where to fish Depends what you want to fish for, but I would recommend avoiding smaller ponds and lakes if you intend to eat your catch. Even if you get permission, there is a greater chance of the fish being "muddy" in taste. Also, it may seem obvious but look for any signs of pollution near the water or up stream. Gasworks on the canal may be obvious but the effects of fly tipping or drainage from agricultural land may not be. If in doubt, fish... but don't feast. Canals in rural areas should be ok but do your homework. Also because the canals will be slow moving at best it might pay to "purge" the fish before eating to get rid of the muddiness. Putting the fish (dead of course!) in a bowl of slightly salted water for 24hrs seems to do the trick quite well. As I said earlier wherever you choose to fish, make sure you know the bye-laws and local regulations for that water. If your not sure, your local tackle shop will have more details.