



FREQUENTLY ASKED FISHING QUESTIONS

Fishing or “Angling” is defined under the Massachusetts General Laws as trying to catch fish with a hand line or rod, using a hook baited with natural or artificial bait.

Click on a question to view the answer.



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Q. Do I need a fishing license to go fishing?

A. Yes if you are 15 years of age or older. For residents 15-17 years of age, and those 70 and over however there is no fee for that license (other than any associated convenience fees while purchasing). For all other license questions including resident and non-resident requirements and fees please consult a current copy of the Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife Guide to hunting, freshwater fishing, and trapping, which can be found at <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/laws-regulations/>.

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Q. Do I need a license to take my child (under 15) fishing?

A. Taking into consideration the definition of fishing under the MA general laws (see above) you would only need a license if you are in control of a baited hook on a line in the water. So if you are helping your child bait their hook, or you are removing a fish from a hook, or untangling their line you would not need a license. The minute you cast the line for him or her, or reel in the line, you are now fishing, and would need a license.

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Q. Where can I purchase a fishing license?

A. A Massachusetts fresh-water or salt-water fishing license may be purchased online at [MassFishHunt](#), at any [MassWildlife office](#), and at select vendors throughout the state. Note: if you are purchasing your license online it is helpful to have a printer available.

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Q. Are there any free fishing days (days when no fishing license is required) in Massachusetts?

A. Yes there is a free fishing weekend every June (typically the first full weekend in June). This allows people of any age, resident or non-resident, to fish any public waterbody without a fishing license from 12 A.M. on Saturday to 11:59 P.M. on Sunday. Also check out programs offered by *MassWildlife's* Angler Education Program, as there is no license required for participants at any of these “learn to fish programs.”

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Q. Where can I learn how to fish?

A. You can learn by attending one of *MassWildlife's* Angler Education Program events. For a list of these programs go to www.mass.gov/masswildlife and look for them under the **Education and Events** tab. In addition, there are thousands of books and other written materials on fishing, many of which can be found in your local library. Use the internet to search “learning to fish” – and look for videos, images and other information. And finally one of the very best ways to learn is by partnering up with someone who has been fishing before. Even if that person is not an accomplished angler, so much can be learned and experienced from fishing with a buddy.

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Q. What do I need for fishing equipment to get started?

A. Aside from your fishing license (if you're 15 years of age or older) you'll need nothing more than a simple live bait setup consisting of a spin casting (push button), or spinning rod and reel, a few hooks and bobbers, and your bait – typically garden worms or night crawlers. As with any hobby or pastime you're just starting out here, so no need to break the bank on equipment until you know this is something you truly want to pursue.

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Q. Do I have to use live bait?

A. Absolutely not. If you dislike putting the hook into something alive, there are many other alternatives, likely things you have around the house right now. Check in your refrigerator or freezer for cheese, chicken, hotdogs, or bread as these are popular favorites as live bait replacements. Nothing really beats live bait for its smell, movement, and texture, but certainly it shouldn't be an impediment to anyone interested in fishing. Small dense pieces of those food items and many more can work really well. There is also bait you can buy in small jars that come in pellet, paste, or live bait forms and smells that can work well. Then there are fishing lures. Some work very well, while others seem designed to catch anglers more than fish. It's recommended that you stay away from lures initially as these are not only expensive, but confusing to the beginner – just so many designs, colors, and sizes. Let's see if you like fishing first before you spend your life savings on lures.

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Q. Where can I go fishing?

A. Here in Massachusetts there are literally thousands of fishable waters and lot's of them overlooked, like that small pond or stream you pass by everyday on your way to work or school. Find out more about fishing opportunities, go to <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dfg/dfw/hunting-fishing-wildlife-watching/fishing/fishing-opportunities.html>.

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Q. What kind of fish should I go fishing for?

A. Anything that bites, literally. When you're just beginning a simple bait set up, as described above, can bring surprising results. You can catch anything from the smallest sunfish to larger fish like bass, pickerel and trout. It really depends on the waterbody you select, the location on that waterbody, and the time of year. A couple of simple tips here - always look for structure wherever you fish - a downed tree, large rocks or boulders, overhanging bushes or trees, undercut stream or river banks, or a weed bed. This

structure gives the fish some cover and shade, and so is a more likely area to find them. Also go fishing during the warmer months at first if you can, when the water temps are at least in the upper 60's. For the beginner those warm-water fish (mostly species of sunfish) are much easier to catch, so try fishing in the late spring, summer and early fall for quick action.

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Q. Can I eat the fish I catch?

A. An often asked question, with no simple answer. It really depends on whether your pregnant, intend to be, and your age. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) keeps and maintains a list of waters and advisories for those waters, however there is a statewide advisory for pregnant women, women intending to be pregnant, nursing mothers, and children under the age of 12 to **NOT** eat any fresh water fish from lakes, ponds, rivers, or streams, other than those stocked by MassWildlife. So that's pretty much all fish except stocked trout if you fit into that demographic. The major contaminants for this advisory are Mercury and PCB's. Please consult the MA Department of Public Health at <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/> for much more information concerning this topic. While this does sound ominous please remember that just because they don't recommend you eat these fish, you can still go fishing, and it's absolutely fine to handle the fish. The contaminants are locked up in the tissues so touching them will not harm you. Most people today fish for fun and not for food anyway.

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Q. Are there laws pertaining to the size and amount of fish I can keep?

A. Yes, however only if you intend to keep those fish. As stated above most people today fish for fun and not for food so any creel (how many fish you can keep), and size limits are mute if you don't intend to keep any fish. Please consult a current copy of the Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife Guide to hunting, freshwater fishing, and trapping at www.mass.gov/masswildlife for more information on fishing rules and regulations.

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Q. Can I keep a fish alive and bring it home to put in my fish tank, or private pond?

A. Absolutely NOT. There are only two legal reasons allowing one to keep fish; to eat, or to have it mounted (professionally preserved by a taxidermist) if you deem it a trophy. The two things both of these have in common are that the fish must be dead upon leaving the water your fishing. It is illegal to move fish from one water body to the next, including small baitfish. These transport laws were put into place to protect our waters from the spread of nuisance species and to prevent the spread of disease.