

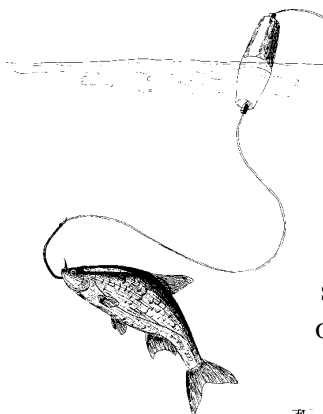
FISHING TIPS

Here's some advice to increase your success when fishing in Florida's many lakes and streams.

Black bass: The largemouth bass is the best known and most popular freshwater gamefish in Florida. Found statewide, largemouth bass have excellent growth rates, particularly in the productive waters of central Florida. Historically known for huge bass, Florida remains an outstanding destination to catch a trophy. The increasing popularity of catch-and-release bass fishing, along with habitat management, protective regulations and a recent high water cycle will help to improve anglers' chances of landing a largemouth bass 10 pounds or heavier.

Spring is the best time of year to catch bass, when fish move into shallow water to spawn. Spawning may occur as early as January in extreme south Florida and as late as May in the panhandle, but

March and April are peak months. Most large bass are taken at this time; after spawning, many large females move to offshore areas.



Golden shiners may be hooked through the lips, or through the back behind the dorsal fin. A split shot sinker 6-12" above the hook is optimal.

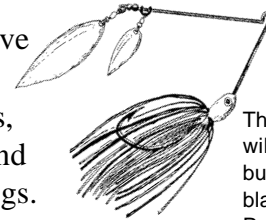
The best live bait is a golden shiner, fished under a float or free-lined. Typically, the shiner is hooked through the lips or back with a large hook, 2/0 to 5/0. A medium to medium-heavy rod with

14- to 20-pound test line is preferred, particularly when fishing in areas with thick vegetation or cover.

The plastic worm is the most dependable artificial bait for largemouth bass. A weedless "Texas- and Carolina-rigged" worm is effective for fishing Florida lakes with heavy plant cover. Worms come in a variety of colors and flavors,

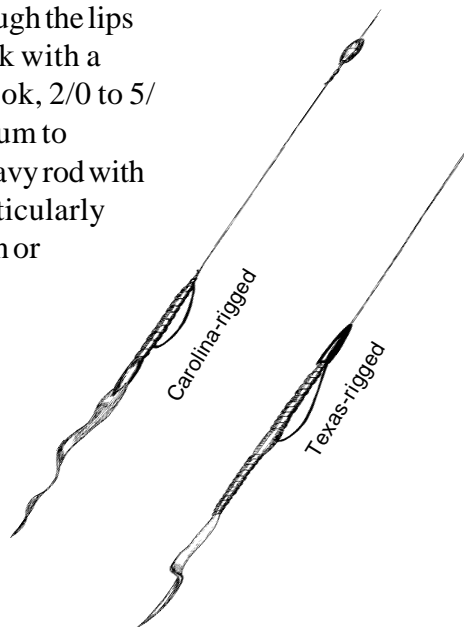
and bass may favor certain types depending on light conditions; be sure to have both light and dark colors available, as well as several sizes of tapered worm weights from 1/8 to 1/2 ounce. Purple "metalflake" or red shad worms with twirly-tails are popular, and plastic lizards can be effective as well. Most plastic worms are worked slowly along the bottom or through cover by raising the rod tip a few feet, then allowing the worm to sink. The line should be kept fairly tight to feel the strike. Typically an angler will feel the bass "tap" the worm once or twice lightly. By lowering the rod tip and waiting only until the slack is out of the line before setting the hook, anglers greatly lessen the chance of injury due to deep hooking. With active bass and dense underwater vegetation, "jerk worms" are an excellent bait. Rigged without sinkers, these worms are jigged rapidly over vegetation, with brief pauses to let the worm sink slowly. Bass hit these baits hard, and an instant hookset is recommended.

Other effective baits are spinner-baits, crankbaits and topwater plugs. Spinnerbaits are very good in the spring, usually fished slowly around drop-



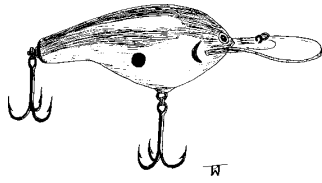
This spinnerbait has willow-shaped blades, but round "Colorado" blades are common. Popular blade colors are silver and gold, but louder colors like chartreuse are also used.

offs and cover. If a slow retrieve fails, try "buzzing", retrieving the spinnerbait rapidly so the blades ripple the surface.



With the Texas-rig, a bullet weight slides down to the nose of the worm. The Carolina-rig has a weight secured up the line, allowing the worm to float above underwater vegetation.

Crankbaits typically imitate baitfish or crayfish, and a straight retrieve is usually effective. The design of the plastic lip determines how deep the lure dives, and anglers can adjust their choice of baits based on water depth. Popular colors are white, shad, firetiger (green striped with orange underside) and crayfish imitations.



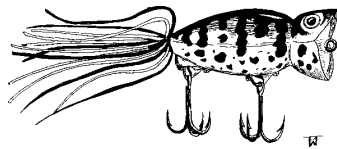
The longer the lip, the deeper a crankbait dives. This model would be effective on a deep river bank or sharp dropoff.



Slow twitches entice bass into striking, but sometimes a noisy, erratic retrieve is necessary.

Topwater baits are exciting to fish because the angler can see the strike. Topwater plugs that imitate wounded baitfish may be twitched to entice bass. Others are

designed to make noise and a faster, erratic retrieve may antagonize a bass into striking. Topwater lures are most successful during early morning or late afternoon. Stay ready for a surprise strike and strike and set the hook immediately.



The Hula-skirted popper in a frog pattern is effective in vegetation and at night.

Although the largemouth bass is by far our most common black bass, other species can be found in Florida. The smaller Suwannee bass occurs in the Suwannee River and its tributaries, and in the Ochlockonee River. Favoring rock outcrops and moving water, Suwannee bass prefer crayfish to many prey items of largemouth. Crayfish-imitating crankbaits worked through deep-water bends will attract these hard fighting fish, as will plastic worms, lizards or crayfish. The Santa Fe River is another good spot, and trophy-sized Suwannee bass up to three pounds can be found in the Ochlockonee River north of I-10.

Another overlooked black bass is the shoal bass. Its habitat is flowing waters of the Apalachicola River basin, particularly sections of the Chipola River above the Dead Lake in Calhoun County. Although

the shoal bass may reach eight pounds, one- to two-pound fish are most common. Small spinnerbaits worked through the shoals or rock outcrops may entice a shoal bass into striking.

Panfish: A variety of panfish, or bream as they are popularly known, is available throughout Florida. Bluegill, the most common panfish, thrives in lakes and ponds, but good populations can be found in rivers, particularly below dams. Bluegill eat mostly insects and their larvae, but worms are an effective bait, either fished on the bottom or suspended below a float. Bluegill spawn throughout the summer, congregating in large "beds".

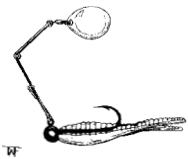
Anglers may find 30 - 40 shallow nestholes scooped out in a small area. Crickets, grubs, sand maggots or other insect larvae will all catch bedding bluegill. Use a small hook, #6 or #8, with a split shot about six inches up the line. For artificial baits, a 1/8 ounce "beetle spin" with a white or chartreuse body on ultralight tackle is an excellent choice. Fly rodders are successful with popping bugs, rubber spiders or insect imitations.

The redear sunfish, or shellcracker, also a popular panfish. Although they prefer snails and clams, redear sunfish are caught most on earthworms around the full moons of March and April when their spawning activity peaks. Shellcracker grow larger than bluegill, with fish over 1 1/2 pounds common. The world record redear sunfish (4.9 pounds) was caught in Merritt's Mill Pond in Jackson County.

Redbreast sunfish, also known as river bream and redbellies, are the flowing water cousins of bluegill. Redbellies are more common in rivers than bluegill, but can be often found in backwater areas with less flow. The same live baits that work for bluegill will also catch redbreast sunfish.



Anglers may have to adjust the depth of their worms until they locate panfish.



These small spinners range from 1/8 oz. to as small as 1/50 oz., with different styles and colors of plastic bodies.

The spotted sunfish, or stumpknocker, is an often overlooked stream panfish. Aptly named, the stumpknocker can be found in the tangle of roots at the water's edge. Although spotted sunfish rarely exceed eight inches, this fiesty species provides great sport on light tackle. Tiny (1/16oz.) beetle spins pitched close to the

shoreline can be deadly. The lower Suwannee River is one of the best spots for this sportfish.

Black crappie, known locally as speckled perch or specks, are another popular panfish in Florida.

Crappie weighing up to two pounds are not uncommon. The premier fishing location is Lake Okeechobee, but good crappie fishing can be found throughout the state. Unlike most other panfish, crappie spend much of their time offshore, feeding on small fish. Successful anglers often drift through deeper water, fishing with small

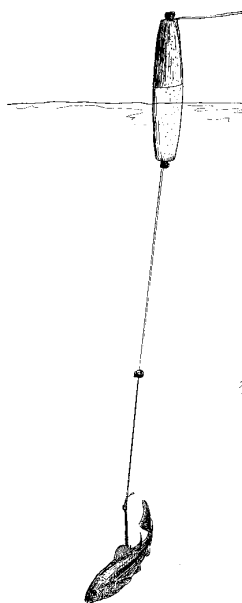
A small feather jig can be deadly for black crappie. Try ultralight tackle to increase to your casting distance.



minnows or freshwater grass shrimp until they find a school. Try a light wire #4 hook and small split shot below a float. Speck anglers typically use several rods or poles, fishing at different depths until they pinpoint concentrations of fish.

Specks move inshore to spawn during the early spring, sometimes gathering in large numbers around heavy cover. Crappie also readily strike artificials, with 1/16- to 1/8-ounce feathered or curly-tail jigs in white, yellow, pink and chartreuse the most popular colors.

Tipping these jigs with a live



Black crappie like open water. Fish your minnows at several depths until you locate a school.

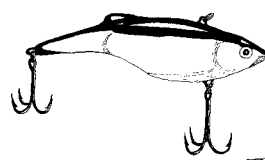
minnow makes them even more effective. Night fishing for crappie has become popular, as well as effective. Any of the above baits or artificials fished near a lantern or floodlight can produce nice stringers. Most crappie fishing occurs in the cooler months, but anglers who fish into the summer do very well, especially at night.

Striped bass, white bass and sunshine bass:

Striped bass are found primarily in the Apalachicola River and the St. Johns River and its tributaries, and to a lesser extent in Lake Talquin and Ochlockonee River, the Blackwater River, the Nassau River and the St. Marys River. Striped bass need long stretches of flowing water to reproduce successfully, and these conditions are rarely found in Florida. In addition, stripers do not tolerate water temperatures over 75°F for long; during Florida summers, striped bass become less active and must find cool water springs or canopied streams to survive. Because of this, striped bass populations are maintained only through annual stockings from Commission and federal hatcheries. The best striper fishing occurs from fall through spring, when these fish are actively feeding. Live shad are very effective, particularly below Jim Woodruff Dam on the Apalachicola River. Stripers may weigh up to 60 pounds; use heavy tackle with 3-4 oz. weights in high flow areas. In the St. Johns River, the Croaker Hole and the jetties at the south end of Lake George are good fall and spring striper areas, and the first few miles of the

Wekiva River have several

locations where stripers congregate. A live menhaden, golden shiner, croaker or eel is a good choice as bait. Lures that resemble baitfish also

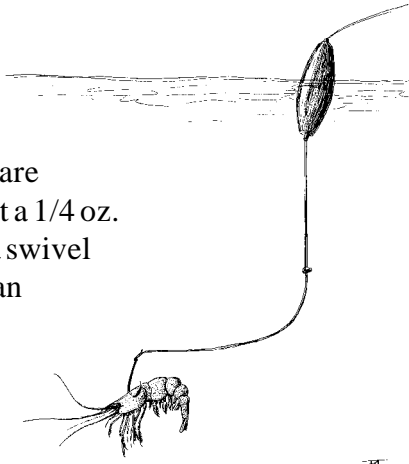


This shad imitation resembles the favorite food of stripers and sunshine bass.

produce impressive strikes; these include heavy jigs, as well as sinking and floating lures in white, chrome or chartreuse.

White bass are found in the Apalachicola River, and the Ochlockonee River and Lake Talquin. In the same family as stripers, white bass seldom exceed four pounds, with one- to two-pound fish more common. The best white bass fishing occurs in the

spring, when fish move upriver to spawn. Small crawfish or grass shrimp on #4 hooks fished in deep river bends or at the edge of sand bars are effective baits. Put a 1/4 oz. egg sinker above a swivel on your line, with an eight-to 12-inch leader tied to your hook; use lighter line for the leader, so if you get snagged you don't have to replace the complete rig. Small jigs in white or brown are often productive.



Grass shrimp are an excellent bait for white bass. Use a leader 2 pounds lighter than your regular monofilament.

The sunshine bass, a hybrid of striped bass and white bass, is artificially spawned at Commission hatcheries and stocked around the state. This fish generally survives and grows better in hatchery ponds than stripers. Because they tolerate warm water better than stripers, sunshine bass are stocked more widely. Shad are a preferred food, and these hybrids are stocked in lakes with an abundance of gizzard and threadfin shad. Striped and sunshine bass are stocked together in several river systems, and the some of the best fishing is found in the Apalachicola River and the St. Johns River. The Escambia River near Pensacola is stocked annually with hybrids and maintains a fishery near the mouth. Live bait, including shad, is especially effective, but jigs, spoons and imitation-minnow plugs also produce. In urban lakes, shrimp, squid and even cut-up pieces of hot dogs will attract sunshine bass. Some sunshine bass have been raised on artificial food and readily concentrate around mechanical feeders that periodically dispense food pellets.

Catfish: Catfish may be one of the staples for the angler who enjoys eating his catch. Channel catfish are abundant throughout Florida, spawning in holes and crevices in flowing water. The channel catfish grows to weights in excess of 40 pounds, although the typical size is less than five pounds. White catfish, and yellow and brown bullheads usually range from one to two pounds and readily spawn in lakes and ponds where they also provide good fishing. These catfish prefer many of the same food items as bream, although they are opportunistic and will rarely pass up a meal. The “whiskers” are loaded with sensory cells that enable catfish to locate their food by smell. Take advantage of this by using baits with strong odors: chicken liver or gizzards, shrimp, cut mullet and commercial stinkbaits. Other baits work well too, especially earthworms, and sometimes freshwater clams. Many catfish become active just before dusk and at night, and fishing success is best during these times. Fish on the bottom with a sturdy



Chicken liver or gizzard on the bottom smells too good for catfish to pass up.

#2 to #4 hook and a heavy split shot sinker. Catfish spines may cause a painful injury, and anglers should take care when handling these fish. The Commission's Richloam Hatchery produces 200,000-300,000 channel catfish fingerlings annually for stocking in urban lakes.

The flathead catfish has recently become well established in the Apalachicola River in north Florida and also attains weights of over 40 pounds. Trophy-sized flatheads are abundant in the tailrace and deep holes below the Jim Woodruff Dam, where anglers use heavy salt water tackle with line testing 30 pounds or more and sinkers heavy enough (two to four ounces) to keep baits on the bottom in heavy current. The bait of choice is a live bream hooked through the tail with a heavy, 2/0 to 5/0 hook.