

# To Spin or Not to Spin?



**Fly rod or spinning rod?** For many Wisconsin trout anglers, a spinning rod is the only way to go. Increase your success in catching wily trout with these tips from DNR fish biologists and technicians who are avid trout anglers.

## Work that all-purpose go-to bait

I exclusively fish for trout with a spinning rod. I can't cast a fly rod worth a darn. Besides, most of the streams I fish are tiny and so choked off with alder and other shrubs that it wouldn't work anyways. I use a short (5-foot or 5 foot 6 inch) ultralight spinning rod. I matched it up with a decent reel that can handle multiple casts with a sturdy bail spring, and smooth retrieves with its bearing system. For line, I use a 6-pound fluorocarbon line. It is tough,



*A nice, early season brown trout comes to the net. Photograph: Mark Baldock*

casts great, and has little memory. For lures, I have found that in early spring, a tiny minnow-like crankbait in gold flash or rainbow trout color works great. For deeper holes I use a #1 spinner, matching the color to the stream condition (gold if it is stained, and silver if it is clear). My all purpose "go-to" bait is a #7 (2 3/4") original floating minnow crankbait in brown trout color. I like to make cannibalism work for me! I've had several instances where fly-fishermen have worked some habitat with no success and then I came in with these lures and had multiple fish! Either way they enjoy it, it is wonderful to get out in these early spring months when water levels are high and the vegetation is low! They don't stand a chance! Whether regulation or not, I pinch all of my barbs for a quick release (of trout or tree)! - Mark Baldock, fisheries technician, Horicon

## Fish slow and deep

I've had success with Micro-jigs tied to imitate common (fly) nymphs - Hare's Ear, Hendrickson, March Brown, Pheasant Tail, Prince, and various stone fly patterns. I like the size 10, 1/16 oz. tube jig head. Also, on the same jig head: plastics - small, green/black/brown, scent impregnated. These fish do feed, but mostly on bottom oriented invertebrates - stone fly, early may fly larvae, and crayfish. So, fish slow and deep, mostly "dead drift." It has been my experience that active, aggressive retrieves with spinners, spoons and crank baits usually work poorly when



Try to bring the fish quickly to the net and release it as soon as possible. Cold air can damage the fish's gills.

Photograph: Mark Baldock

the water is cold. However, some of the “olde tyme poachers” swear by a spinner buzzed along the edge of an ice shelf. Supposedly there are times when big, hungry browns would smack the living daylights out of a number 2, brass blade spinner. To spin anglers, I suggest single hooks -- easier to unhook fish and fewer non-lethal injuries. Hooking ability? I don't see any difference compared to trebles. However, on a crank bait you may have to experiment with hook size and type to maintain the right action. Please, get rid of the extra belly and front treble hooks, too. On a larger crankbait, they only translate into a catch-release nightmare-one in the jaw, one in the gill cover or body, and one in the eye. The fish might recover but will likely carry the disfiguration of a bad bar fight.- Frank Pratt, fisheries biologist, Hayward

### Fish later in the season and later in the day

Spinning gear with artificial lures will generally work best after snow melt has occurred and as water temperatures warm in early to late April. Fishing the warmest part of the day should increase your catch rates in the early season due to warmer stream temperatures, which will make the trout more active. The bigger trout will also be on the feedback after snowmelt has occurred as water temperatures continue rise. Some of the biggest fish of the season can be caught on spinning gear in mid to late April if the conditions are right. A light weight rod with 6-8 pound test will work well. Spinning gear can also be very effective after a warm rain fall event when the water is a little turbid because trout can readily see the spinner blade in the water compared to other types of lures. Any spinners with a silver or gold blade seems to work best especially if the water is a little turbid. Any top floating lure that imitates a minnow in a silver, black or brown color seem to work best and will best imitate many of our common stream forage species such as chubs and shiners. – Heath Benike, fisheries biologist, Barron

### Know when to move on

Fish small spinners, fish them slow so they run deep and don't waste too much time in any one hole -- if the fish don't cooperate after two to four casts in the sweet spot, it ain't gonna happen...move on. Spinners of all makes rooster tails and even black jigs...are proven producers. Some anglers try BIG ( No 11 ) floating minnows- same as for pike or walleye - these are for BIG trout in BIG water.- Kurt Welke, fisheries biologist, Fitchburg



Knowing when to move so you can cover more water can be a very successful early-season philosophy. Photograph: Kurt Welke