



The author's daughter, Jane Stevens, finds the panfish are biting.



A worm is Jane's bait of choice today.

# Kid fishing

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE ATTITUDE.

*Story and photos by Jessie Stevens*

Fishing. It's a pastime that can engage multiple generations out in nature and, if you are so inclined, can put dinner on the table at the end of the day. What better way to engage with a young one than to head outside, fishing poles in hand, for an evening of fun?

Imagine a kid sitting on a bank next to his or her parent, hat pulled low over his eyes, line in the water, relaxing and waiting for a bite. Now, bid that imagination a fond farewell. Patience is a virtue, one that we should strive to teach our children, just not when we are looking to foster a love of fishing.

There are two main truths to fishing with kids. The first is that there will be chaos.

Lines will tangle, poles will be dropped — in and out of the water — fingers will be hooked, squeals will be heard all up and down the bank, fish will fly through the air, worm buckets will dump and chances are good that at least one kid will take an inadvertent swim.

The other truth, is that if the fish aren't biting, kids will be bored. Bored kids never turn into fishermen.

The key then, is to go when the fish will be biting. The best opportunity for this is when the panfish spawn in the spring. The males come into the shallow water to make their round pebbly nests on the bottom and the females, of course, follow. There they are, nice and shallow, hungry from all that reproductive work and ready to eat anything that hits the water. Time it right and on a nice evening any worm that sinks below the surface will be swallowed up by a brightly colored fish. A few may be "monsters" as big as your hand and all will bring a smile to a kid's face.

Of course, there are times that, despite our best plans, fish will be fish and sometimes they just don't bite. Remember, nobody has time to complain of boredom when they are having fun. Play with the worms, poke in the shallows, throw stick "boats" in the water, do all the things your dad would have frowned upon

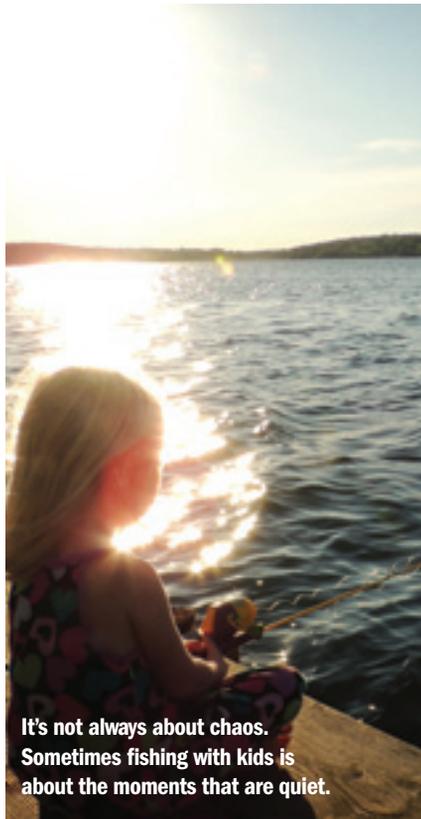


The author's daughter, Ivy Stevens, maneuvers a cane pole that is bigger than she is.

during a serious fishing expedition. Keep it fun and leave a line out, just in case.

It is in the nature of those of us who are fishermen to want to bring the stuff, the bells and whistles and fancy poles and bait. Remember, this is kid fishing; leave it all behind. A cane pole is ridiculously long in the hands of a child but the lack of any moving parts makes it perfect. Even a tiny pole with your cartoon character of choice will do. Leave the adult-sized spinning rods, fly reels and fancy tackle home for another day. Instead, get the shovel, grab the kids and go dig worms.

Picking worms with an adult manning the shovel brings an excitement all its own. When mom is digging in the dirt even squeamish kids get excited about finding worms! Turn over dirt until you think you have enough for your evening of fishing and then dig that much again. You don't want to run out of worms. Kids go through worms at a remarkable rate. Sometimes the fish eat them, sometimes they mysteriously fall off the hook, and sometimes they need to be played with or dropped. Sometimes the whole



It's not always about chaos. Sometimes fishing with kids is about the moments that are quiet.

container ends up in the drink. Take a deep breath, prepare yourself for the chaos and keep digging.

Once you've got an ample supply of worms, rig your lines with a simple bobber, sinker and hook — grab a hemostat on your way to the lake for unhooking fish that were allowed to nibble at the worm for too long and you are ready to begin.

So long as the parents come mentally equipped for the chaos, the squeals as the lines tangle will be happy and wet arms will be forgotten in the excitement of the newest "monster fish." A new fisherman just might bud before your very eyes.

Fry up the filets of all those "monsters" for dinner and those kids, hungry from the afternoon, will dive into their plate and, along with their meal, accidentally devour a lesson in just where their fish dinner comes from.

A few sessions of panfishing in the spring and you'll have enthusiastic young fishermen on your hands.

Just remember, the fish need to be biting and there will be chaos. 

*Jessie Stevens writes from Edgerton.*

## >>> SAFE EATING GUIDELINES

Some waterways have fish consumption advisories. The good news is that panfish have short lives that they live out near the bottom of the food chain, two things which mean they'll have less time to absorb toxins into their bodies before you bring them home for dinner. Often, they are among the least restricted fish when it comes to safe eating. To find safe eating guidelines for fish in Wisconsin, go to [dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/consumption/index.html](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/consumption/index.html).

## >>> BAIT AND SWITCH

While the pictures here show kids hauling in bluegills and pumpkinseeds, if they aren't in your area, don't give up! Even carp can be caught one after another in the spring. Just switch your worms for canned corn, though you might have to give the kids a hand pulling them in. If you aren't sure what the fish are biting on, ask around. Local bait shops are always in the know and can provide you with any licenses needed for your area. Find out what your local fish are, keep the set up simple and head out with a smile.