

# Catch them if you can

TRY FISHING IN THE PRESERVES

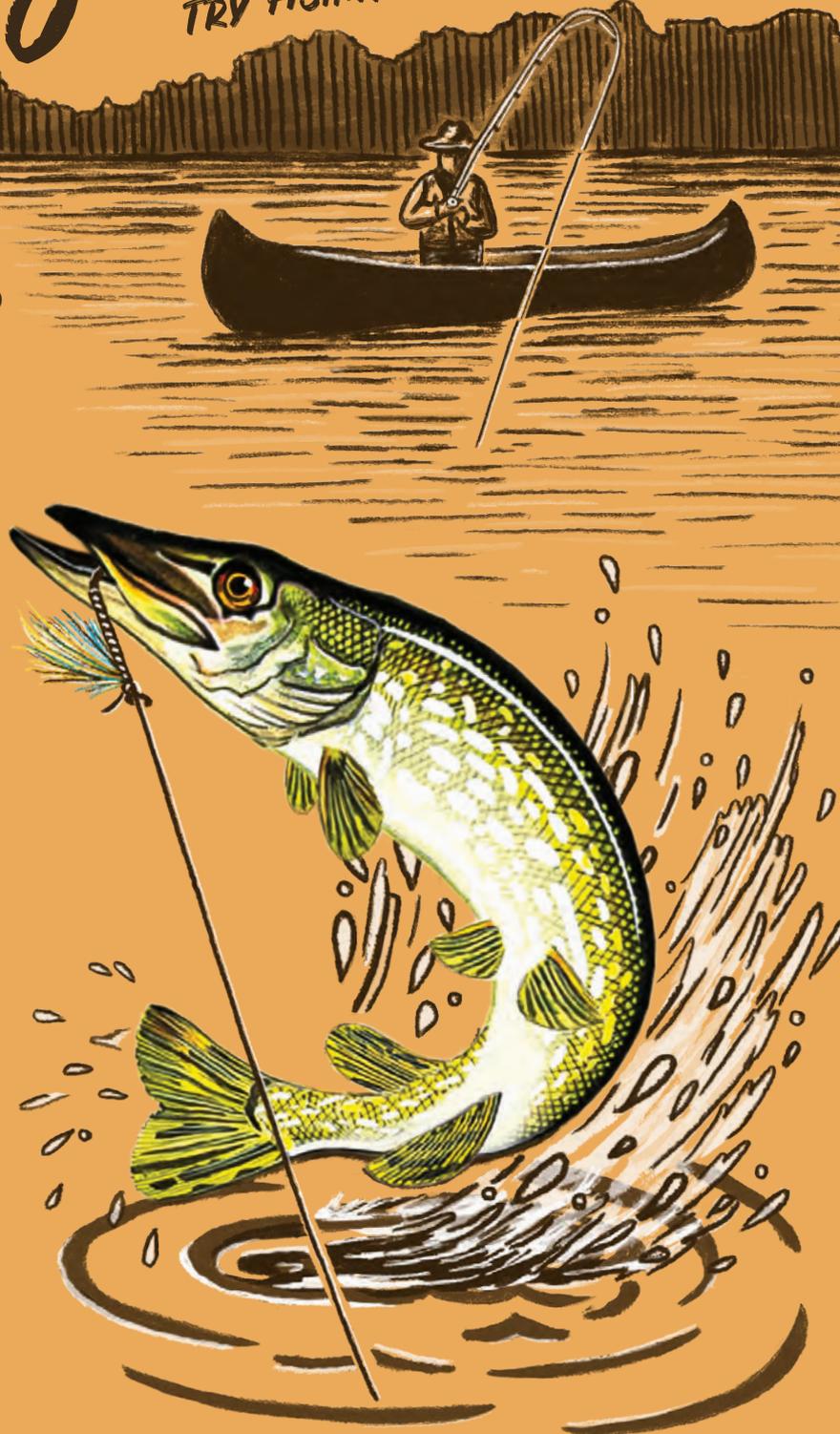
Nationwide, 3.1 million people fished for the first time in 2020 as a way to recreate responsibly during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation survey. The scale of fishing is what you make of it: a laidback, relaxing pastime or a focused, competitive activity. Whether you've fished plenty or are just picking up the rod and reel, try casting a line in your Lake County Forest Preserves.

## **BAITING THE HOOK**

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources requires all anglers age 16 and up to have a fishing license. Purchase one online or at an approved vendor, including the Independence Grove marina (Libertyville).

Fishing is allowed at 23 waterways in 16 preserves. Waterbody sizes vary, from the 6-acre Dugdale Lake at Greenbelt (North Chicago) to the 115-acre Lake at Independence Grove. Many preserves offer wheelchair-accessible fishing piers.

Bring your own small, nonmotorized watercraft to Long Lake at Grant Woods (Ingleside), Hastings Lake (Lake Villa), Lake Carina (Gurnee), Van Patten Woods (Wadsworth), or one of six canoe launches along the Des Plaines River. A four-lane launch for boats, personal watercraft and paddlecraft is available at Fox River (Port Barrington). You can also rent fishing boats, canoes, kayaks, paddleboards and pedal boats seasonally at the Independence Grove marina.



Site-specific state fishing regulations, such as creel limits—the number of fish you can take home in a day—apply at all forest preserve waterways. Visit [ifishillinois.org](http://ifishillinois.org) for details. Catch-and-release fishing is mandatory at Independence Grove and Nippersink (Round Lake). We encourage the use of barbless hooks, which are easier to remove and cause less damage to fish.

Bluegill, bowfin, carp, channel catfish, crappie, largemouth bass, muskellunge (muskie), northern pike, smallmouth bass, wall-eye and yellow perch are found in Lake County waterways. Some species are common and easier to catch, particularly panfish, a class so named because they're edible fish that don't usually outgrow the size of a frying pan.

Carp and channel catfish are plentiful in most preserves. Large predatory fish, such as walleye and muskie, are fairly rare and challenging to catch. Learn about these sport species from videos, books, other anglers and fishing clubs.

If you need a line to cast, purchase an inexpensive starter kit from a sporting goods store. Bring along a rod and spincast reel, fishing line, tackle box, hooks, sinkers, bobbers, needle-nose pliers, fishing forceps, sunscreen, and polarized sunglasses.

There are four types of reels: spincast, spinning, fly and baitcast. Beginners typically start with a spincast reel and rod, and graduate to a spinning reel. Depending on what they're fishing for, professionals and avid anglers use a baitcast, fly or spinning reel. "Probably the most versatile piece of equipment is a spinning reel," Facilities Manager Ken Winston said.

Simplicity is an advantage when starting out. "I'm all about the tangle-free, rod and reel combos that kids get started on," said Assistant Public Affairs Manager Allison Frederick. "Those work great if you're trying to entice a young person to fish for the first time."

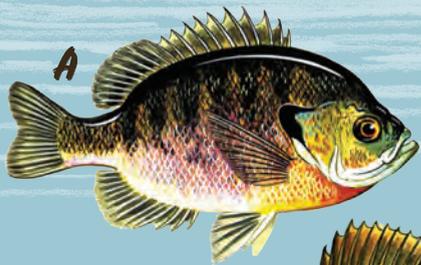
Most of our staff suggested trying live bait first. An effective rig can entail a worm and a bobber. Worms and minnows, the only live bait permitted in the preserves, are attractive to nearly all fish. Intermediate fishers might experiment with artificial lures, which typically advertise the species they're intended for on their packages. Look at water clarity when selecting lure colors.

"In clear lakes, use browns and greens," said Winston. "There's a color called green pumpkin, which looks lifelike. If you go to a murky lake, believe it or not, the colors fish see best are black and blue."

**PHOTOS:** (Top to bottom) Fishing is a self-paced, rewarding activity available at 16 preserves. • Nippersink has two lakes totaling 13 acres. • Independence Grove is a popular fishing spot for beginner and experienced anglers. • Start small with a new fishing gear collection and add to it over time. Keep extra supplies: hooks, sinkers, line and lures.



# School of Fish



## A. BLUEGILL (*Lepomis macrochirus*)

Bluegill and other sunfish are commonly caught. They hang out in large schools, alert for predators.



## B. YELLOW PERCH (*Perca flavescens*)

The yellow perch needs clear lakes with areas of aquatic vegetation. They have very sharp spines on their fins and their scales are tough.



## C. NORTHERN PIKE (*Esox lucius*)

The aggressive northern pike usually lies in the weeds and waits for unsuspecting fish to pass by. In one move, the pike bursts forth and grabs prey with its sharp teeth.



## D. LARGEMOUTH BASS (*Micropterus salmoides*)

The largemouth bass is a member of the sunfish family. They're often found near aquatic plants and boat docks.



## E. COMMON CARP (*Cyprinus carpio*)

These invasive fish are found in many waterways, causing problems for native species.



## F. MUSKELLUNGE (*Esox masquinongy*)

The muskellunge (muskie) is similar in appearance to a northern pike. Look for vertical stripes on its side. This fish reaches more than 40 inches in length.



## G. BLACK CRAPPIE (*Pomoxis nigromaculatus*)

The black crappie is a round, silvery fish with a dark back. They're usually found in schools in deep water near brush or rock piles.



## H. WALLEYE (*Sander vitreus*)

The walleye lives in dark, deep water. They spend most of their time migrating around the lake, looking for schools of minnows and other perch.



## I. CHANNEL CATFISH (*Ictalurus punctatus*)

The channel catfish is a common resident of the lake bottom. Its whiskers help it locate prey and avoid bumping into things. Watch out for spines on the dorsal and pectoral fins.

## PIER PRESSURE

Of those who responded to the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation survey mentioned on page 1, nine out of 10 said they planned to keep fishing.

“Fishing is one activity that maybe you don’t make time for in life, but people found themselves with more time and a strong reason to be outdoors last year,” Frederick said. “Try it and don’t quit before you catch at least two fish. A tool like our Fishing Guide or a chat at a local bait shop will teach you a lot.”

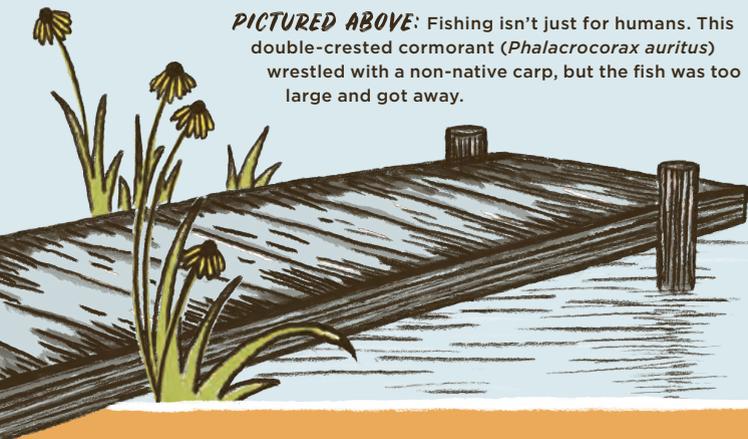


**“SUCCESS IS HOW YOU INTERPRET IT. YOU’LL BE SURROUNDED BY NATURE AND SEE BIRDS, TURTLES AND FROGS, EVEN IF YOU DON’T CATCH A FISH.”**

—Gary Glowacki, Manager of Conservation Ecology

Fishing can be a consistently rewarding experience. “At a young age, I would watch fishing shows,” Winston said. “Every single time they caught a fish, the excitement was exactly like it was when they were six years old. It’s like that for me.”

**PICTURED ABOVE:** Fishing isn’t just for humans. This double-crested cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) wrestled with a non-native carp, but the fish was too large and got away.



## ROD AND REEL ONE IN

With license and gear prepped, choose a destination. Every fishable preserve is marked with an icon (🐟) on the map on page 17. Waterbody size, depths and available species are on our website at [LCFPD.org/fishing](http://LCFPD.org/fishing). We also collected five-star fishing spots on the next page.

Staff generally agreed that sunrise and sunset, spring through fall are when many fish species are most active. Water quality, weather and waterway structure also influence the quantity of fish caught.

“If you fish where the wind blows toward shore, that will whip up small bits of food in the water,” said Environmental Educator Mark Hurley. “This attracts bluegills, which attract predator fish.”

Judging whether a waterbody provides good fish habitat is a useful skill to develop. Search for cover.

“A healthy shoreline and aquatic vegetation help sustain good sport fish,” Manager of Conservation Ecology Gary Glowacki said. “An ideal place is weed beds growing right at a drop-off underwater. You can cast along the edge of the weeds so you don’t have to deal with snags.”

Adhere to leave-no-trace principles. When you cast, avoid hooking yourself and others, along with logs, rocks and terrestrial plants. Lures and line caught in trees can tangle wildlife, sometimes fatally. Unhook caught fish and return them to the water quickly “so they’re stressed for the shortest amount of time possible,” Frederick said. “Don’t leave anything behind on the shore. Dump unwanted bait in the trash, not in waterways. Recycle your containers. Most sites have recycling and fishing line collection tubes.”

There’s no guarantee whether the day’s catch will be plentiful or not. In the push and pull of luck versus skill, our staff thought skill was more crucial.

“It’s three-quarters skill and one-quarter luck. If you can skillfully place the lure or live bait, you give that fish a chance to bite,” Hurley said.

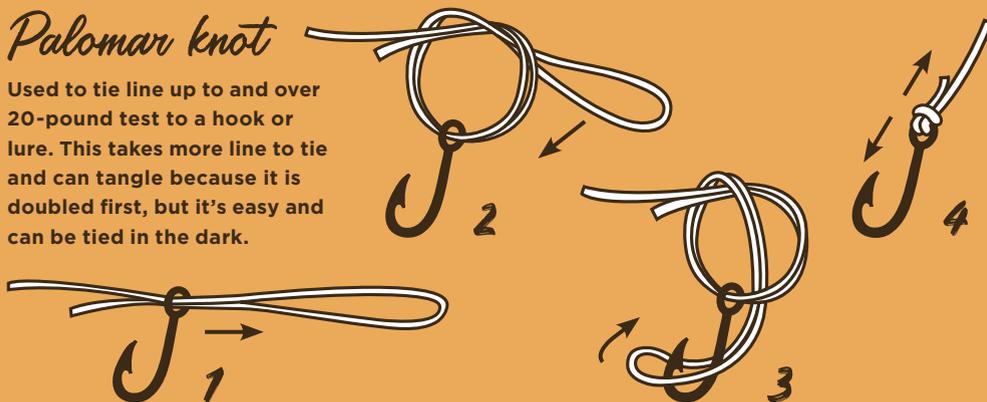
## (K)not it!

Don’t tie yourself in knots. Tie fishing line into knots around hooks, lures and other lines.

**VOCAB TIPS:** The *tag end* is the end of the line you tie to the knot. The *standing end* is the line that comes from your reel.

## Palomar knot

Used to tie line up to and over 20-pound test to a hook or lure. This takes more line to tie and can tangle because it is doubled first, but it’s easy and can be tied in the dark.





# Five-Star Fishing



Independence Grove. Half Day Pond (Vernon Hills). Lake Carina.

**KEN WINSTON**  
Facilities Manager

**WE PUT THE QUESTION TO OUR STAFF: WHAT ARE YOUR FIVE-STAR FISHING SPOTS?**



Nippersink, road crossing at the lake. Independence Grove, North Bay bridge.

**MICHAEL HAUG**  
Landscape Architect



Independence Grove, North Bay Pavilion. Des Plaines River, close to Ryerson Conservation Area (Riverwoods) and also off Route 173 near Van Patten.

**STEPHANIE BOSACK**  
Event Operations Manager



Fox River has my most diverse catches, including smallmouth bass. Along the stretch of the Des Plaines River that runs through Captain Daniel Wright Woods (Mettawa) for northern pike.

**ALLISON FREDERICK**  
Assistant Public Affairs Manager



Independence Grove. Great for beginner fishers to catch crappie, bluegill or bass. There are also northern pike and muskie for the experienced pros.

**GARY GLOWACKI**  
Manager of Conservation Ecology



Des Plaines River for northern pike and bass.

**MARK HURLEY**  
Environmental Educator



Along the banks of the lake at Nippersink.

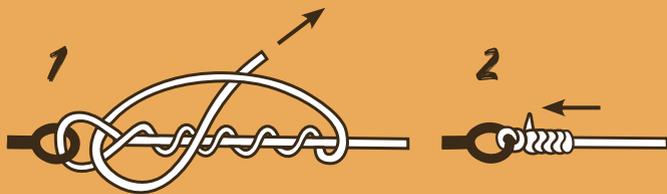
**APRIL VAOS**  
Environmental Educator



Taylor and Banana lakes at Lakewood (Wauconda). Easy to access and a short walk from the parking lot to the pond with kids and fishing gear.

**JOHN NELSON**  
Director of Operations and Infrastructure

**PHOTOS AT TOP:** (Left to right) Fox River, Independence Grove, Des Plaines River.



## Improved clinch knot

Used to tie line up to 20-pound test to a hook, swivel or lure. Make five turns of the tag end around the standing end before putting the tag end back through the formed loop. **Top tip:** Frederick makes seven turns, not five.

## Blood knot

Used to join two lines of similar diameter. The secret is making five turns of line with each tag end around the overlapped standing end. **Top tip:** Make one series of turns, tuck the tag end between the two lines and repeat with second line.

