

Tips for Keeping Fish Alive

- Use sharp hooks. Keep a small whetstone or fine file in your tackle box and check the point of your hook from time to time, especially after you have been caught on the bottom. Points often get dull, making it more difficult to set the hook through the tough mouth of a fish.
- Consider crimping the barbs on your hooks down to make removing hooks easier. Check your line for abrasions frequently to avoid hooked fish breaking your line.
- Never play a fish longer than you need to land it. A lengthy period of exertion could reduce the chances of the fish surviving if you plan to release it to swim, and perhaps spawn, another day. Ensure the tackle and line you are using is appropriate for the size and species of fish you are targeting, so they are landed promptly.
- Your decision whether to keep or release a fish should be made quickly, as it determines how you will handle it. In some cases, the fish is obviously too small.
- If you decide to release the fish, try not to handle it. By using your needle-nose pliers, you should be able to remove the hook from its mouth, sometimes without taking the fish out of the water.
- If you must handle the fish to control it, wet your hand first or wear a wet cotton glove. Never grasp a fish with dry hands as this removes the “slime coat” from their body and could cause infection.
- Keep the fish in water as much as possible. If you have to take a fish out of the water, start holding your breath. Fish can only hold their breath as long as you can. When you need to take another breath, the fish needs to be back in the water to get oxygen.
- Before you release the fish, it should appear to be alert and in an upright, swimming position. If it appears exhausted or injured, cradle it gently in your hands in an upright position and move it gently in an “S” motion so that water can flow over its gills, providing oxygen. When it struggles to get free, let it swim away. Do not throw or toss the fish.
- To minimize deep hooking, set the hook as quickly as possible. Allowing fish to run with the bait only encourages them to swallow it deeper, resulting in a higher probability of injury.

- If a fish swallows your hook, do not pull on it or attempt to cut the tissue into which it is imbedded. Cut the line as close to the hook as possible and release the fish. There is a good chance it will survive. The digestive juices of the fish are strong enough to corrode the hook, rendering it harmless.
- Remember to have your needle-nose pliers ready to remove a stubborn hook. If you try to yank and twist it, you might do more damage to the fish. Remember, there is a barb on the sharp end of the hook. Consider crimping it to make removal of the hook easier.
- Don't lay the fish on the dock, the deck of your boat or the ground next to the shoreline. Again, the removal of the fish's protective coating causes long-term effects.
- Never hold fish through the gills or stick your fingers in their eyes. Lip the fish gently and do not bend back the lower jaw as it can break easily, particularly in larger bass. For larger bass give support to the body under the wrist of the tail so that you are not holding the fish's weight balanced on its own jawbone. Fish can be safely handled by firmly grasping the fish where the tail connects to the body with one wet hand while lifting and supporting the body in an upright position with the other wet hand.