



SECTION

9



INTRODUCTION TO ICE FISHING

Not only is fishing a great summertime activity, it's also a fun winter pastime. Ice fishing is a great way to spend those cold winter days.

Many species of fish can be caught through the ice. For certain species, ice fishing can often be better than open-water fishing. The main species sought by ice anglers are pike, pickerel, walleye, panfish (sunfish, yellow perch and crappie), and rainbow, brown and lake trout.

Fishing access can often be better during the winter. Anglers normally limited to shore during open-water seasons can access an entire lake, as long as the ice is thick enough.

WHAT GEAR WILL YOU NEED?

Ice Augers and Spud Bars

In order to ice fish, you must first cut a hole through the ice. This can be done with either a spud bar or an ice auger.

Spud Bar (Ice Chisel)

A metal rod with a sharp tip used for chiseling a hole through the ice and checking ice thickness. Be sure to have a lanyard attached to your spud, to avoid losing it through the ice.



Skimmer (Ice Scoop)

A skimmer or ice scoop is used to remove slush and ice chunks from the hole you are fishing through.

Tip-ups

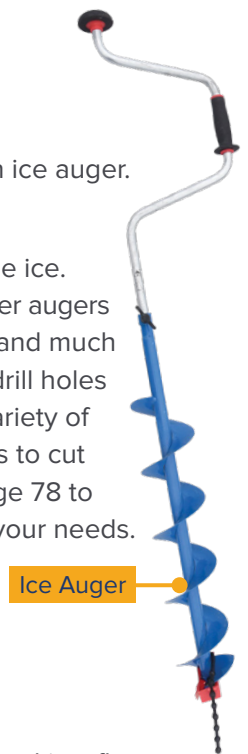
Tip-ups are devices that sit over holes in the ice and signal anglers when fish bite. The most common signal is a flag that trips (pops up) when fish take the bait. Each fish is then retrieved by pulling the line in by hand. Most anglers set out multiple tip-ups to increase their odds of catching fish.

Rigging a tip-up

For most fish, wind 50 yards of backing (Dacron™ or ice-line) on the spool. Add a 2- to 3-foot monofilament leader between the backing and the hook. The strength of the leader will depend on species of fish you're after (see table on page 78). Use a barrel swivel to connect the leader to the backing. Hook size will also depend on the species of fish you're after and the bait you are using (see table on page 78). Attach a split-shot sinker to the leader 18 to 24 inches above the hook to help get the bait down.

Ice Auger

A device to drill or cut a hole through the ice. Hand augers require muscle power. Power augers use a motor. Power augers are heavier and much more expensive, but they allow you to drill holes quicker and easier. Augers come in a variety of sizes. The larger the size, the harder it is to cut a hole through the ice. See table on page 78 to choose the auger size that best meets your needs.



Setting a tip-up

Attach a weight, called a depth sounder, to the hook and lower it to the bottom. Raise the weight the distance from the bottom you would like your bait to be. Attach a line marker (e.g. a small float/bobber or a button) to your line at the water line and reel up to it. This will allow you to return the bait to the same depth you want to fish. Bring the weight back up and remove it. Bait your hook and lower it to your pre-marked depth. Set the flag or other signaling device depending upon the type of tip-up you are using. It is a good idea to check your tip-ups often to make sure they still have bait. Make sure to keep the holes clear of ice and slush.



Traditional tip-up



A depth sounder helps you find out how deep the water is.



A button makes a cheap line marker.

Minnnows are the bait most often used with tip-ups. You can either hook the minnow through the lips or under the dorsal fin. Make sure your baitfish are certified disease free when you purchase them. Never dump unused baitfish or water from your bait bucket into a lake or pond. Undesirable aquatic invasive species might be mixed in with your bait or bait water.

Jigging Rods

Jigging rods are usually around 2- to 3-feet long. Choose a rod power and line strength to match the species of fish you are targeting (see table on page 78). You can attach a reel or use a simple line holder, such as two pegs, to wrap line around. A small spinning reel spooled with monofilament works best in most situations.

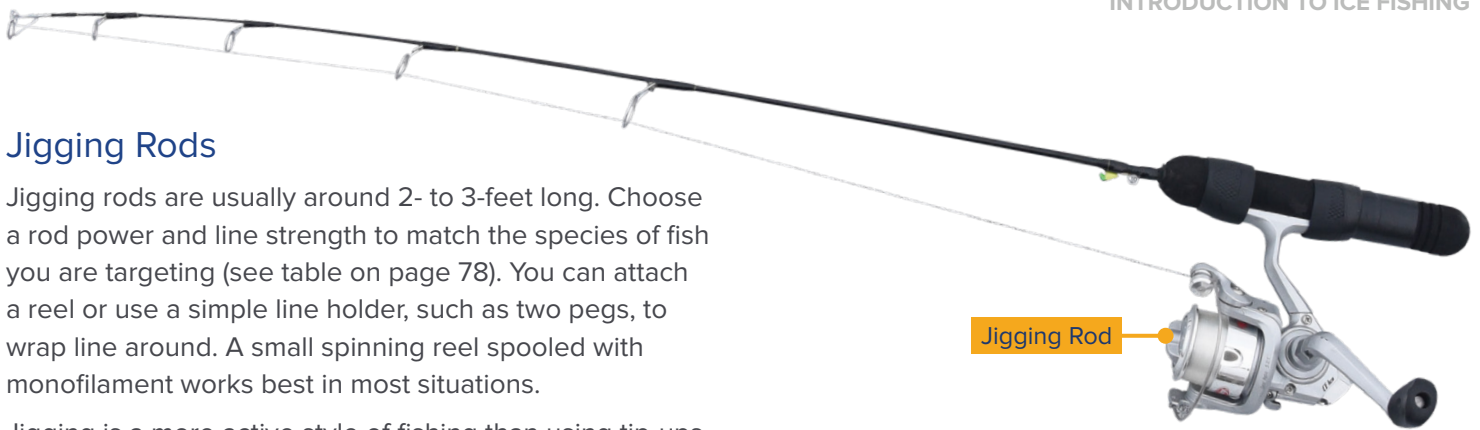
Jigging is a more active style of fishing than using tip-ups. By jigging your bait (raising the rod tip up and down a few inches), you help attract fish. Generally, you will jig the bait a few times, and then pause for a few seconds. Fish usually take the bait during the pause.

Lures and Bait

You can use live or artificial bait while ice fishing. For panfish and small trout, use small jigs. For walleye, pike, pickerel and lake trout (or larger trout), use jigging spoons and swimming jigs. Lures are often tipped with some form of bait. The natural baits commonly used with jigging lures are minnows, minnow heads, and fly larvae, e.g., called spikes or mousies.

Sleds/Shelters

Getting your gear to your fishing spot is easier with a sled. A child's plastic sled works well. Many types of sleds made especially for ice fishing are also available. These often have compartments for storing gear, and many come with an attached shelter. Many types of ice-fishing shelters, from simple wind breaks to portable fish houses, are also available. Shelters block the wind and make ice fishing more comfortable.



Jigging Rod

Ice fishing jigs



Jig tipped with spikes



Ice sled



Ice Shelter

WHEN TO FISH

Fish during the same times of day you would during open-water fishing. Early morning or late afternoon tend to be best. Midday is generally less productive.

WHERE TO FISH

Fish in the same areas you do in other seasons: weed lines, humps, depth changes, points or other structure. Contour maps (www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9920.html) can help you find some of these places.

If you think you are in a good spot but are not catching fish, try changing the depth you are fishing. Since fish, especially panfish, tend to school in winter, if you find one, there should be others around.

You may have to move around to find where the fish are. Schooling fish also tend to form schools of the same size fish, so if all you are catching is small fish, move on to try to find a school with larger fish.

WHAT ARE YOU FISHING FOR?

Bluegills

Bluegills can usually be found over or on the edge of weed beds in 15 feet of water or less. Try jigging with small jigs tipped with spikes from a few feet under the ice to just off the bottom until fish are found.



Perch

Perch can be found at depths from shallow weed beds less than 10-feet deep to flats in 40 feet of water.

Try setting tip-ups baited with small minnows or jigging with small jigs tipped with spikes.

Fish within a foot or less of the bottom where perch are usually found.



Crappie

Crappies may be found along weed edges or suspended in the water column anywhere from a few feet under the ice to inches off the bottom.

Start jigging near the bottom with small minnows or small jigs tipped with spikes. If no fish are found, jig at different depths to find suspended fish. Fishing for crappie can be very good after dark.



VIDEO GAME FISHING?

Veteran ice anglers often use fish finders or “flashers” and underwater cameras while fishing. These electronic “toys” help them find fish, find structure, and determine water depth under the ice.

The following table provides guidelines for gear choices based on your target species.

RECOMMENDED GEAR BY FISH SPECIES				
Species	Hook Size	Line/ Leader LB Test	Auger Size	Jigging Rod Power
Panfish	6-8	4-6	4-6"	Ultra light (UL)
Trout	4-6	6-10	6-8"	Medium (M)
Lake Trout	4-6	8-12	8"+	Medium heavy (MH)
Walleye	4-6	6-10	6-8"	Medium (M)
Pickerel	4-6	6-10	6-8"	Medium (M)
Northern Pike	1-2	10-17	8"+	Medium heavy (MH)

Pike/Pickerel

Anglers usually fish for pike and pickerel in shallow water (5-15 feet) around or over weed beds, using tip-ups baited with minnows. Pike usually prefer large minnows from 4-7 inches.

Pike and pickerel have sharp teeth, so a wire leader is recommended. When setting your tip-ups, suspend your minnows 2-3 feet off the bottom or high enough so they are above any weed growth.



Trout

Trout can be found around points, drop offs or humps. Unlike the open-water seasons when they avoid warm shallow water, trout can be found anywhere from just a few feet under the ice to just off the bottom. Set tip-ups at a variety of depths until fish are found. Fish tip-ups baited with minnows, or jig with jiggling spoons tipped with minnows or minnow heads.



Walleye

Look for walleye around points, flats and shoals. Fishing is often best just before and after dark. Fish within a foot of the bottom. Jig with jiggling spoons tipped with a minnow or a minnow head, or use tip-ups with 3-4 inch minnows.



WHAT TO WEAR

It's going to be cold when you are ice fishing, so it's important to dress for it.

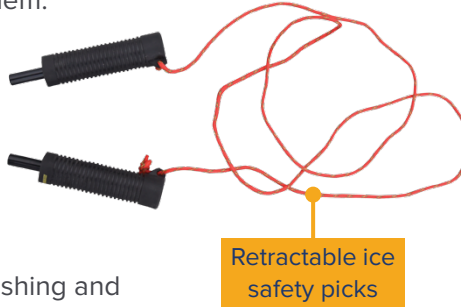
- Dress in layers. Start with a layer of material with the ability to wick (remove) moisture from your skin. Avoid cotton clothing which loses its ability to keep you warm when wet. Many wind and water resistant clothing options are available today. Clothing made of Gore-Tex™ or wool are two good material choices.
- Use waterproof boots with thick soles. The thicker the soles, the more insulation between your feet and the ice. Wearing moisture wicking liner socks under warm socks will help keep you comfortable.
- Add cleats to your boots to prevent falls.
- Bring extra gloves or mittens as these items have a way of getting wet or misplaced.
- Disposable hand warmers and toe warmers are a good way to keep you warm. Make sure to throw the wrapper in the garbage and not on the ice!
- Bring sunglasses. Sun glare off of snow can be intense.
- Use sunscreen. Just because it is cold outside doesn't mean you can't get a sunburn.



The right clothes and gear will help you enjoy the day and stay safe.

ICE SAFETY

- Ice thickness and condition are the main safety concern. Most water bodies do not freeze evenly. A minimum of 4 inches of solid (clear) ice or 8 inches of white or “snow ice” (which is half as strong as clear ice) is the general rule for safely walking on the ice. If you are unsure of the ice thickness, drill regular test holes as you go, at least every 150 feet.
- Avoid ice near moving/open water or around docks because it is often unsafe. Dock owners often put “bubblers” around their docks to prevent thick ice from forming and damaging them.
- Always carry ice safety picks (two handles with spike points) to help you to get out of the water should you break through the ice. You can purchase them (right) or make your own with dowels and nails.
- Let someone know where you will be fishing and when you plan on returning. For adults, fishing with a friend is a good idea. Children should be accompanied by an adult. Using good judgment is essential.



Over 4 inches of clear ice – OK to walk on.

REFERENCES

Publications

- Ice Fishing Secrets (In-Fisherman Library Series).1991. Al Linder, Doug Stange and Dave Genz. In-Fisherman Inc.

Websites

- NYSDEC – Ice Fishing Basics www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7733.html
- Wisconsin natural resources – What fish do under the ice. dnr.wi.gov/wnrmag/2009/12/ice.htm
- Ice Safety www.dnr.state.mn.us/safety/ice
- Take Me Fishing – Ice fishing <http://takemefishing.org/fishing/ice-fishing/what-is-ice-fishing>

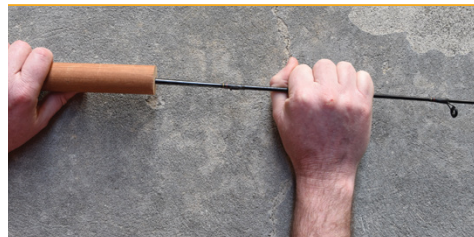
ACTIVITIES

Make a Jigging Rod



1. Take the tip section of a broken fishing rod. If the tip section is the one that’s broken, cut the rod back to just above the next guide. Use the top 24-30” section.

2. Make a handle by sawing a 6-inch piece of 1-inch wooden dowel. Drill a hole slightly larger than the diameter of the rod into one end of the dowel.



3. Insert and glue the rod into the hole you drilled (may need to wrap tape around the rod end for a snug fit).



4. Either hammer two nails into the dowel about 3 inches apart to make a simple line holder, or tape a spinning reel to the dowel with electrical tape, making sure the guides line up with the reel.