


Just because your favorite lake is frozen over, doesn't mean you need to stop fishing for the year. Ice fishing is a great way to spend those long winter days. For certain species, ice fishing can often be better than open water fishing.

## SAFETY

Ice thickness and condition are the main concern. Most water bodies do not freeze over evenly. A minimum of four inches of solid clear ice is the general rule for safely walking on the ice. Check the ice thickness by drilling test holes at regular intervals. Don't fish alone. Let someone know where you are and when you plan on returning. Carry ice safety picks (two handles with spike points) —  to help you get out of the water should you break through the ice.



## WHAT TO WEAR

It is important to dress in layers. Start with a layer of material that can wick (remove) moisture from your skin. Avoid cotton clothing, which loses its insulating ability when wet. Many wind- and water-resistant clothing options are available. Gore-Tex® and wool are two good material choices. Bring extra gloves, as they tend to get wet. Wear warm, waterproof boots. Add cleats to your boots to help prevent falls.

## WHEN AND WHERE

Early morning and late afternoon tend to be the best times to fish. Fish in the same areas you would in other seasons: weed lines, humps, depth changes, points or other structure. Contour maps (<http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9920.html>) can help you find some of these places.

Consult the New York State Freshwater Fishing Regulations Guide as some trout waters are closed to ice fishing. The guide is available where licenses are sold and at <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7917.html>. If you have any questions contact the regional DEC office covering the waterbody you want to fish.

## WHAT GEAR WILL YOU NEED?

### Ice Augers and Spud Bars

The first step in ice fishing is to cut a hole in the ice. This can be accomplished with a spud bar or auger. There are two main styles of augers: hand and power augers.

Hand augers are lighter and cheaper, but require more effort to cut through ice. Power augers, either gas or electric, cut through ice quickly, but are heavier, more expensive and may be restricted on some waters. Augers come in a variety of diameters. Choose an auger size based on the fish you will be seeking.

A spud bar is simply a large, heavy chisel used to chip away at the ice. Be sure to have a lanyard attached to the spud, to avoid losing it through the ice.

### Skimmer (Ice Scoop)

A skimmer or ice scoop is needed to clean slush and ice chunks from the hole.



### Tip-ups

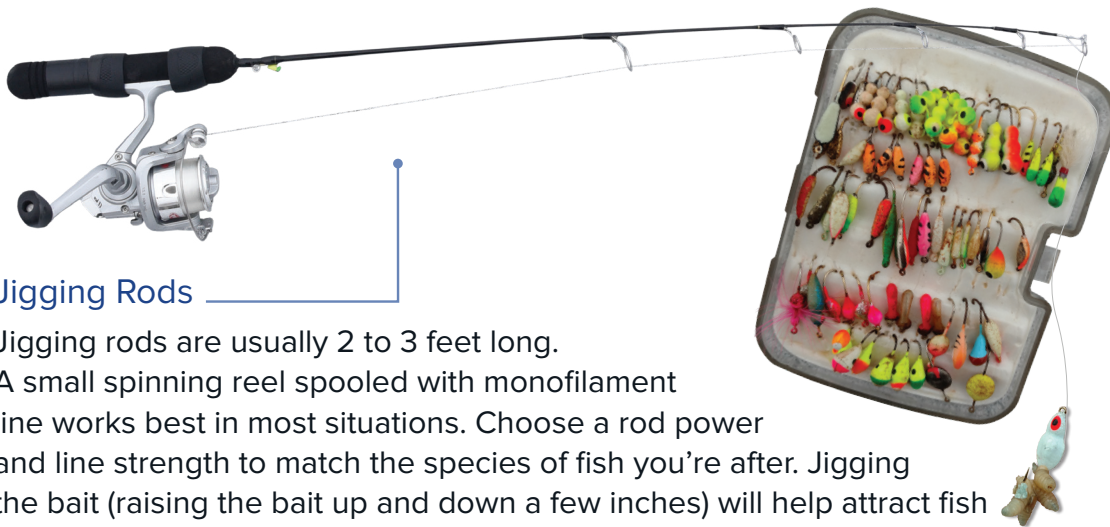
Tip-ups sit in a hole cut in the ice and signal anglers when a fish bites. Most popular types have a flag that trips when a fish takes the bait. The fish is then brought in by pulling the line in by hand.

**Rigging a tip-up** – The amount of line needed depends on the depth of the water you will be fishing and the species you are after. For most fish, use 50 yards of backing (Dacron® or ice-line), with a 2-3 foot monofilament leader between the backing and hook. Use a barrel swivel to connect the leader to the backing. Hook size and leader strength will depend on the species you're fishing for. A split shot sinker should be attached to the leader 18-24" from the hook to help get the bait down.



Traditional tip-up

**Setting a tip-up** – Attach a weight, called a depth sounder, to the hook and lower it to the bottom. Raise the weight off the bottom the distance you prefer for your bait. Attach a line marker to your line at the water line. A marker allows you to return the bait to the same depth. Two commonly used types of line markers are small floats (bobbers) or old buttons. If using a button, be sure to pre-thread the line through it before fishing. 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. Check your tip-ups periodically to make sure they still have bait and to clear ice and slush from the hole.



## Jigging Rods

Jigging rods are usually 2 to 3 feet long. A small spinning reel spooled with monofilament line works best in most situations. Choose a rod power and line strength to match the species of fish you're after. Jigging the bait (raising the bait up and down a few inches) will help attract fish to your bait. Jig the bait a few times, then pause it for a few seconds. Fish generally hit the bait during the pause.

## Lures and Baits

There are many artificial lures made especially for ice fishing, from small ice flies used for panfish (sunfish, perch, and crappie) to large jigging spoons for lake trout. Most lures are tipped with some form of bait, commonly minnows and fly larvae called spikes or mousies. Minnows are most often used with tip-ups, and can be hooked through the lips or under the dorsal fin.

## Sleds and Shelters

Getting gear to your fishing spot is easier with the use of a sled. A child's plastic sled works well, but there are sleds made specifically for ice fishing, often with compartments for storing gear and sometimes with an attached shelter. Shelters block the wind, making ice fishing more comfortable. Many types of ice fishing shelters, from simple wind breaks to portable fish houses are available.

### TIP

Five-gallon buckets work well for storing gear, may be used as a seat, and, after a successful day on the ice, provide a great way to transport your catch.

## Electronics

Ice anglers often use fish finders or underwater cameras. These aren't necessary for success, but can help determine water depth, find fish-holding structure, and determine fish movement under the ice.

## RECOMMENDED GEAR BY FISH SPECIES

SPECIES	HOOK SIZE	LINE/LEADER LB TEST	AUGER SIZE	JIGGING ROD POWER
Sunfish/Perch/ Crappie	6-8	4-6	4-6"	Ultra-light (UL)
Trout/Walleye/ Pickerel	4-6	6-10	6-8"	Medium (M)
Lake Trout	4-6	8-12	8"+	Medium-Heavy (MH)
Northern Pike	1-2	10-17	8"+	Medium-Heavy (MH)

## GENERAL FISHING METHODS

### Pike/Pickereel

Use tip-ups baited with minnows in shallow (5-15 feet) water around or over weed beds. Pike usually prefer large (4-7 inch) minnows. Set your minnow 2 to 3 feet off the bottom or high enough so your bait is above any weeds. Pike and pickereel have sharp teeth, so a wire leader is recommended.

### Sunfish

Sunfish 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 close to the bottom in a variety of locations 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.

### 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 jigging spoons tipped with a minnow or use tip-ups with 3-4 inch minnows.

### Crappie

Crappies may be found along weed edges or suspended in the water column anywhere from a few feet under the ice to within inches of the bottom. Jig with small minnows or small jigs tipped with spikes. Fishing for crappie can be very good after dark.

### 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 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 and jig with jigging spoons tipped with minnows.

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.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information on where to fish, visit <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7749.html>.

For more information on ice fishing, visit <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7733.html> and <http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/98506.html>

