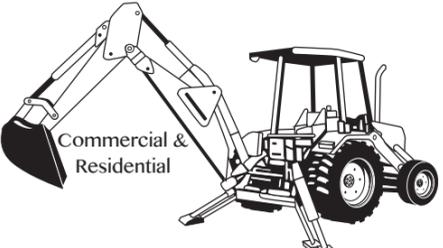




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As sunfish bite heats up, anglers encouraged to eat small fish



Anglers can find nutritious, plentiful sunfish in all areas of the state

Feeling that tug on the line, an angler sets the hook and reels in a small sunfish, then asks the perennial question: Should I keep it?

Sunfish, also known as bluegills and pumpkinseeds, are a go-to species for anglers looking for a meal and many anglers may be surprised to know they're actually encouraged to keep small ones up to the limit set by the Department of Natural Resources.

These fish are nutritious and safe to eat regularly, according to consumption guidelines from the Department of Health.

"We encourage anglers to keep sunfish under seven inches and consider releasing the ones nine inches or larger," said Jon Hansen, fisheries management consultant. "This is opposite what many anglers grew up hearing but it's good news for anyone who wants high odds of bringing home a meal of local, healthy food."

Small sunfish are plentiful and easier to catch than large ones. Keeping small ones has little impact on populations. In contrast, when anglers keep only the large sunfish, which are usually males guarding nests, the small males remaining in the population don't have any need to compete with larger males to spawn and instead of growing, they devote their energy to spawning at younger ages.

After ice-out, sunfish move into shallow, warmer water to eat and later spawn. After

spawning they can be found loitering near aquatic plants, or near docks. Sunfish can be caught readily throughout the state and seasons are open all year.

Fish are a good source of protein. For pregnant women, fish contain healthy fats that are important for a developing fetus and eating fish can lower the risk of heart disease.

A person can't always tell if fish are safe to eat by looking at them, or even by how clean the water appears. The Minnesota Department of Health helps bridge this information gap by providing fish consumption guidelines based on fish species, waterbody, and exposure risk for different types of people. In general, sunfish have lower levels of mercury than other fish; however fish from some waters have other contaminants that impact the guidelines.

For sunfish, statewide guidelines are one meal per week for women who are or may become pregnant and children under 15, and the guidelines don't advise any limit to the number of sunfish meals others should eat.

Anglers should check for site-specific advice that pertains to the water they're fishing. If eating fish from a variety of waters or a specific water isn't listed, anglers should follow the statewide guidelines. Both site-specific and statewide guidance on eating fish can be found at bit.ly/FishConsumptionGuidanceMN.

The site ChooseYourFish.org is another source for statewide consumption guidelines and has recipes and some cooking videos – including recipes for bluegill chowder and perch skillet.

Minnesota is home to a variety of fish in addition to sunfish that anglers can harvest and enjoy eating, including popular species like crappie, northern pike, walleye, catfish and bass. Anglers can find fish consumption advice for lakes, angling information, lake survey reports and more on the DNR LakeFinder at mndnr.gov/lakefinder.

BaitCloud can't be used in Minnesota

A product called BaitCloud and similar products marketed under different brand names cannot be used in Minnesota waters.

These products use a combination of scent, sound and visual attractants to draw the attention of fish. Methods of taking fish are defined in Minnesota laws governing angling gear and the use of artificial baits.

Using BaitCloud or similar products would result in anglers potentially taking fish using one or more of these illegal methods:

Throwing chum (fish parts, corn, etc.) and other physical attractants into the water. This is considered littering.

Using chemicals, drugs, poisons, medicated bait, fish berries or other similar substances.

Using attractants such as artificial light, unless the light is expressly part of a lure.

Placing any substance in state waters that may injure, impact reproduction or taint the flesh of wild animals. While products claim to be innocuous to fish and the environment, little is known if concentrated or repeated use of various substances placed in the water could be harmful to fish, wild animals or aquatic plants.

Chemical attractants are not an authorized method of taking fish unless used as part of angling lure, such as spraying scent on a lure or using scented baits. Dropping an

attractant ball into the water – even if the materials that comprise it seemingly disintegrate, dissolve and cause no obvious harm – is considered a form of chumming or littering.

It is not illegal for Minnesota retailers to sell BaitCloud or similar products or for Minnesota shoppers to purchase and possess them.

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