

FISHING TIPS

SHAD FISHING

SHAD TACKLE

Most shad fishing is done with light spinning gear. A 6- to 7 ½-foot stick with a soft tip and plenty of backbone in the lower two-thirds of its length is perfect. A forgiving tip will help protect light leaders and also aid in the detection of subtle strikes. Having a stout lower end will enable you to turn fish without wearing them out to the point of exhaustion. Spinning reels should be loaded with 4- to 8-pound test and need to have smooth and durable drags – shad put up a good scrap!

SHAD LURES

The classic red & white shad dart still catches plenty of fish today!

Along the East Coast, shad darts and small flutter spoons like *Nungesser* are the top weapons for anglers fishing famed waters like big rivers. The 1/32-ounce Strike King Mr Crappie jig head (in white, chartreuse and pink) with a 1.5- to 2-inch curly tailed grub is king, followed by shad darts up to a half ounce. While red/white and solid yellow were the staple color schemes back in the 1970's and early 80's, chartreuse and hot pink seem to be the two favorites now. Of course, it's a good idea to keep a variety of colors and sizes on hand in case the shad are in a "retro" mood.

You gotta love the simplicity of shad fishing. Grab a box of lures and some jig heads and sinkers and off you go!

Shad are notoriously fickle and will sometimes bite the heck out of a one particular color, and then, on to another.

SHAD: THE BIG SECRET

Shad are a schooling fish and usually where you find one, you find a whole bunch. The really important thing to understand about these jumbo herring is they school up in long, almost single file lines rather than tightly-bunched packs like other fish.

There could be a school of 500 fish in front of you but you'd swear that the pool's devoid of fish because you've been making casts a foot or two on either side of the narrow, strung-out band of shad. File this little nugget into the back of your brain...the reasons will become obvious when we get to the how to catch them part.

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SHORE FISHING

One of the beauties of shad fishing is its inherent simplicity. You don't need a fancy boat and \$7,000 worth of gear to be successful. You can catch plenty of fish from shore and all you really need is a light rod, a handful of jigs and/or darts and some desire. The key is to be able to locate shad holding water.

Deep, slow pools are good places to begin your quest. Shad tend to hold throughout the heat of the day in such spots, where they'll often wait for evening to fall before they continue upstream. Long, uniform flats with slow to moderate current will also attract shad, as will the mouths of tributary streams, current seams and soft current edges. Shad aren't big fans of ascending falls, heavy rapids, fish ladders and the like, so the areas just downstream of such obstructions are also worthy of investigation.

Once you've found a good-looking spot, start by tying on a jig or dart that's just heavy enough to get to the bottom but light enough to drift with the current. If you need extra weight to get down, add some splitshot or a slip sinker 18 to 24 inches above the lure. Position yourself upstream of the water you want to fish and cast slightly down and across the current. Allow your offering to sink near the bottom and swing in a downstream arc. As it drifts, give the jig some action by raising the rod tip 12 inches or so every 3 to 5 seconds. This jigging motion seems to really appeal to the curious nature of the fish and will draw strikes when a simple "dead drift" approach doesn't work. Let the rig drift through the entire run and when it ends up in a position directly downstream of you, jig it a few times in place and then reel up and cast again. Be sure to cover every inch of the area you're fishing because shad can be very easy to miss (remember the long, skinny schools we just talked about?). A jig cast a couple feet on either side of the fish can go unnoticed.

You can also fish jigs and darts under a bobber. Slip floats are the best type of bobber to use for this style of fishing because you can easily adjust the depth at which you are fishing. Set your lure to run a foot or two off the bottom and let it drift through the run with a drag-free presentation. In other words, make sure there is as little line sitting on the water as possible between your float and your rod tip. If any downstream bows for in your line, lift the line off the water (called mending) by raising the rod tip high and to the upstream side of the bobber. Braided line works really well for bobber fishing because it floats. Just be sure to run about 10 feet of clear monofilament or fluorocarbon for a leader.