



fishing



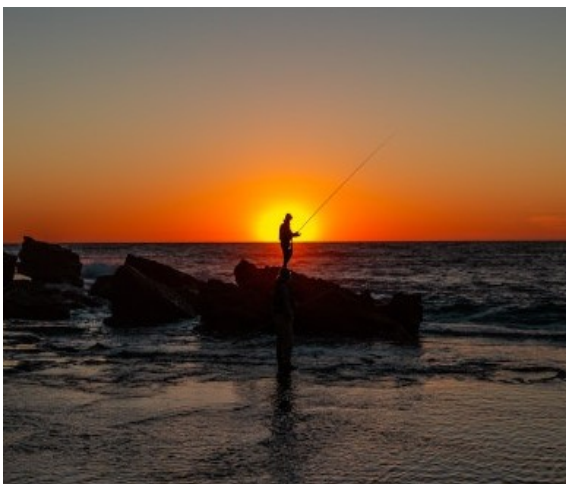
what is it?

Fishing is about trying to catch fish (note the trying!). It can be done in salt or fresh water, with different techniques and approaches. There are a number of methods – rod and line, nets, traps, hands, spears and more. This introduction will specifically focus on small-scale fishing for food from UK wild waters.

Fishing is a good way into obtaining animal protein from the landscape (or seascape). It's relatively cheap and easy, compared to hunting. Fishing takes place all over the world, and many millions of people rely on small-scale, artisanal fishing for local consumption.

History: fishing is an ancient method of wild food procurement, and dates back to the Upper Paleolithic, about 40,000 years ago. Fish were an important part of many hunter-gather(-fisher) people's diets. Ancient techniques include spear, handmade nets, hooks made from bones or thorns, and catching fish with hands. Many people settled, or regularly migrated to, coastal, estuary and riverside locations. Ancient midden piles of shellfish and fish bones are scattered along the UK's coastline – evidence of the importance of fishing for ancient peoples.

Since the 15th century, seafaring boats have developed rapidly. Commercialisation of fishing has meant much larger catches, with overfishing in some areas, greatly impacting fish populations. Due to changes in sea habitats such as acidification and warming, as well as indiscriminate trawling, fish populations are suffering. However, there are still some abundances in the waters around Britain, e.g. mackerel and whiting (at certain times of year).



One of the joys of fishing – spending time by the sea at the quietest times of day.



Atlantic mackerel: fish are the most commonly eaten wild food in the UK.

what are the benefits?

It's potentially more sustainable to catch fish than to buy them. Bought fish may involve trawling, large amounts of by-catch (accidentally caught fish / other animals that die in the process but aren't used for food), as well as the fuel used in the boats and for transport.

If we harvest sensitively, gathering wild food can benefit the environment, as we can avoid farmed or commercially-produced foods that require land, fuel, and other inputs. It's very empowering to be able to feed yourself from wild waters, with just a few simple tools.

Being near the sea, watching the tides, creatures, and plant life can be a wonderful experience, away from screens and modern technology. As long as you plan it right, it can be a truly relaxing experience, nourishing to body and mind. You'll be spending time near water, watching, waiting, observing. This can foster a deeper connection to nature, and can be positive in terms of stress relief and mental health.

Consuming wild food can instill a greater respect for the environment, reconnecting us to the origins of our food, and illustrating our dependency on nature for survival. It also highlights the importance of seasonality and offers an alternative to our current globalised food system, where we can buy anything at any time of year.

Fish are very nutritious, with high-quality, easily-digested proteins, vitamins and minerals. Oily fish also contain fats and vitamins that are vital for health.



A well-earned meal after a day's fishing – cooking your catch right where you caught it.

what can I do?

It helps to have a teacher – so ask someone you know, or if you see someone out fishing, ask them for guidance and tips. Asking for advice in a tackle shop can be helpful too, especially as they will have local knowledge. There are courses on fishing, and plenty of books and online resources. You can also hire a guide to take you fishing.

Freshwater fishing for food is not usually cost-effective or feasible - there are many restrictive laws, licenses, permits etc. Every stretch of fresh water has different rules and regulations and will be owned by different people.

A common misconception is that the sea is equally full of fish throughout. Different fish have varying feeding habits and live at different depths in the water, which dictates the kind of equipment you need to catch them.

Different environments require different tactics, and will yield a different catch:

You can gain access to deeper water from rocks than from a beach, and they provide habitat for fish to feed and live. Beaches are best at dawn or dusk when the fish may be closer to shore. Piers create a wonderful habitat for fish and the creatures they feed on - the legs of the structure offer sanctuary from strong currents and tides. On a charter boat you can access shoals of fish such as mackerel more easily, but with hire costs, it may turn out more expensive than buying fish. In an estuary, you're more likely to catch dabs or flounders, although other fish may be moving through, like salmon or sea trout.

Be sure you know how to kill and gut fish. If you aren't going to eat it immediately, take a cool box with ice blocks to keep your catch fresh. Fish can spoil quickly on a warm day.

For sea fishing, there are few rules if you're using a rod and line (estuaries have their own rules). You're allowed to fish almost anywhere around the coast, with no close seasons. There are minimum landing sizes and some restrictions on what you catch in some areas, such as sea bass.

Check the weather before you go and avoid disorientating sea mists or storms. Be aware of tide times, and the speed of the incoming tide. Be aware of the venomous weever fish, often found in shallow water or rocky areas. If stood on, its spines can cause intense pain. A risk in mudflats and estuaries is quicksand. Go with someone, take a phone, and tell someone where you're going and when you plan to be back.

It won't cost too much to get started – just a good rod and reel. Don't get lured into buying more than you need. As a beginner, limit your scope to a couple of types of fish (those easiest to catch) – and therefore less gear.

Mackerel fishing is generally most cost-effective in terms of time and investment for yield. At the right time of year, you can fill your freezer with highly nutritious food.

It's important to choose where to go and when. Learn about tides, weather, season and times, and how they affect fish. Because some fish are migratory, check which season they'll be inshore. Avoid spawning time. Late summer the fish are at their prime having spent the warm months feeding. Pay attention to legal 'seasons' – when you can catch certain fish.

resources

- see lowimpact.org/fishing for information, links & books, including:
- Martin Ford, *Saltwater Fishing*
- Ian Ball, *Begin Fishing the Right Way*
- Nick Fisher (really), *Sea Fishing*
- anglingtrust.net – Angling Trust
- britishseafishing.co.uk – wealth of info
- planetseafishing.com – ditto
- thinkfish-catchfish.com - ditto

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