

Baitfish or Fishbait?

Is there a difference? You bet!

Baitfish are just that—fish that are used for bait. They include minnows, suckers, chubs, darters or legally taken gamefish. Fishbait are aquatic critters other than fish. They include crayfish, mussels, clams and the larvae or nymphs of aquatic insects.

Does all this sound a bit fishy to you? Just remember it this way: Baitfish are always fish; fishbait are never fish. Of course, there are many other types of bait like worms, crickets, corn and cheese. These tasty treats work fine, but they aren't considered fishbait or baitfish because they aren't normally found in the water.

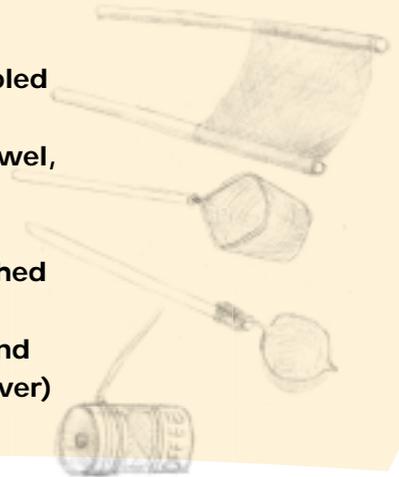
What's the big deal? Does it matter? How does this knowledge help you catch more fish? Knowing the differences between bait and fishbait can help you target the gamefish you are after. You wouldn't use a 6-inch sucker to catch a wild brook trout. Nor would you use a stonefly nymph to catch a musky. Gamefish are also more familiar with what they see around them all the time—smaller fish and aquatic insects, not corn and cheese! Let's take a closer look baitfish and fishbait.

Baitfish and fishbait can be bought at a local tackle store. Or you can catch them in a nearby stream or pond. All it takes is an inexpensive store-bought net or trap. Better yet, make your own. Here are some different types.

Store-bought:
 Long-handled net
 Monofilament cast net
 Wire minnow trap
 Drop net



Homemade:
 Seine (window screen stapled to dowels)
 Long-handled net (dowel, coat hanger wire and net material)
 Kitchen strainer (attached to dowel)
 Coffee can trap (can and window screen stapled to cover)



You have to make decisions once you catch these critters. Which do you keep? How many? How will you store them? Just about any gamefish strikes anything big enough to fit in its mouth. But you'll have more success if you narrow the baits to the gamefish you are after. Remember to check the regulations. Fish, crayfish and aquatic insects should be kept in a container of cold, aerated water. Stonefly nymphs keep best in a foam container filled with wet moss.

The Law

There is no closed season for baitfish or fishbait, except on approved trout waters (March 1 to the trout opener). The daily limit is 50 combined species with no minimum size. Carp and goldfish may not be used as bait. Nets must be less than 4 feet square or in diameter. Unattended traps must be labeled with your name, address and phone number.

Illustration: Ted Walker

Which bait for which fish?

Fathead minnow

for



Crayfish

for



Damselfly nymph

for



White sucker

for



Emerald shiner

for



Stonefly nymph

for

