

10 Opening-Day Worm-Fishing TIPS

by Art Michaels

1 Spinning tackle, baitcasting outfits and spincasting setups with a medium-action to fast-action rod of about 6 to 6.5 feet work well. You can also fish worms with a fly rod, but use only monofilament line: With the fly rod you'll dap the worm into likely looking spots without casting as you would with flies and fly line.

2 Use clear or low-visibility green monofilament line in 4-pound test or 6-pound test. If you're spooled already with heavier pound-test line, use a 2- or 3-foot leader of thinner line.

3 Most bait shops in Pennsylvania sell four kinds of worms: Nightcrawlers, redworms, meal worms and wax worms. Meal worms and wax worms are effective baits, but they are actually insect larvae, not "worms." Nightcrawlers are large and thick, so if you choose 'crawlers, bait up with small pieces. Redworms are smaller than nightcrawlers. Fished whole they offer the trout an undulating, enticing bait.

4 Use baitholding hooks in size 8 or 10 for 'crawler pieces or thin-wire hooks in size 10 for whole redworms. Baitholding hooks have one or two barbs in the shank, which help hold the worm in place. Snelled hooks are conveniently pre-rigged, but they are most often tied with thick, stiff monofilament, which may cause your bait to drift unnaturally. Trout might spot the thick mono easily, too. It's best to tie your hooks directly onto the line with a Palomar knot or an improved clinch knot.

5 Sharpen all your hooks, even new ones. To test a hook's sharpness, with light pressure drag the hook point across your thumbnail. If the hook bites in, it's sharp enough. If it slides across your nail, sharpen it more. A metal nail file you'd buy in a drugstore works fine.

6 Impale the middle portion of a whole redworm on the hook, and guide the hook point about a half-inch through the long portion of the worm. Let the hooked worm portion settle around the hook bend, and leave the hook point exposed. This hooking method lets the worm move naturally as the bait drifts. You can rig a piece of nightcrawler the same way. Or thread the hook point into the worm or piece of nightcrawler and push the worm around the bend and up the shank. Let the hook point hide in the worm.

7 Low water temperatures in early spring keep trout for the most part lethargic. In streams and lakes, they prefer the deeper, slower portions, and they won't jump up and swim a long distance to hit a worm. So the key to catching trout on opening day is to work the worm slowly along the bottom at a natural pace with the current or a little bit slower. To accomplish this drift, attach splitshot about 12 inches above the hook. Use removable splitshot, those with ears that let you easily crimp the shot on the line and remove it. Adjust the weight for deeper or shallower water, or faster or slower water, by using small shot initially and then adding or removing shot.

8 Likely stream spots include undercut banks, overhanging tree roots, fallen tree limbs, midstream boulders, bridge abutments, pools (large and small) that slow faster water, and pockets that appear deeper than surrounding water.

9 Fish worms across-stream and upstream in wider streams, and upstream in narrower streams. Gather in line as the worm moves back toward you. Raise the rod tip occasionally during the drift in a molasses-slow jiggling action so that you maintain the best contact with the bait. When a trout strikes, sometimes with just a *tap-tap-tap*, strike immediately.

10 No luck in the morning? Early in the season trout might become more active later in the day, when the sun has warmed the water a few degrees. ☐