

The Basics Behind Ice Fishing

Ah, winter! As the mercury dips below freezing and the ice thickens on the lake, the long cold winter is both invigorating and inviting to ice fishing enthusiasts across the county. So get out the long underwear, pack your fishing rod, bait bucket, and auger. Pull down your stocking cap and bring along a thermos of hot cocoa as you prepare for an ice-fishing adventure. The allure of peering down a hole for hours is part anticipation, part serenity, part strategy, and part sport. Many anglers will attest that ice fishing can be both easy and exciting.

Dress in layers. Wear wool hats, mittens, and waterproof boots. Ice shanties keep the wind and blowing snow from chilling you to the bone.

During the winter, fish aren't always in the feeding mode and you have to finesse the line. You have to 'sell' the presentation. Use small lures and small bait and gently jig the lure up and down, giving it a little quiver to create slight movement. When you do find them, the action can be fantastic. We can protect the future of fishing by practicing catch and release. A fish's body slows down in the winter reducing its need for oxygen. This helps make catch and release during ice fishing highly successful. Remember to handle the fish quickly and gently.

Check ice conditions before heading out. Make sure the ice is at least four inches thick. Because thickness can vary across an area, check more than one spot. Remember this rule of thumb – "Thick and blue, tried and true. Thin and crispy, way too risky!"

You can make a simple tool that could help save your life if you fall through. Drive nails in one end of two stubby dowels, drill a hole in each of the other ends and tie a rope through the holes. Keep this around your neck so it's handy. Use it to dig into the ice and quickly claw your way out if you fall through.

A great appeal of ice fishing can be the social aspect. Part of the adventure is hanging out around an ice hole with friends and family, telling stories as you wait for a bite. Most winter anglers are happy to share a few tips and swap fishing stories.