

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department

Winter Trout Stocking Program Angling Tips

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Introduction

Every winter many Texas anglers eagerly anticipate the annual rainbow trout stockings offered by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and their cooperators across the state. Rainbow trout are produced and delivered from out of state to our hatcheries, where they are prepared for their final destination in Texas waters. Once all conditions are met, the fish are delivered by TPWD personnel and stocked on a schedule. The stocking schedule can be accessed at the TPWD web site: www.tpwd.state.tx.us/.

Rainbow trout are not only fun to catch for the entire family; they are an attractive fish that make for excellent table fare. Easy to catch and great eating, makes this fish very popular among Texas anglers. This leads to many new anglers anxious to try catching rainbow trout every season. Novice anglers often wonder about the technique behind catching this popular fish in Texas waters. This document is intended to familiarize these anglers with some common techniques used to catch rainbow trout in Texas.

About the rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*)

Rainbow trout are an anadromous, cool- to cold-water fish species. Although rainbows have been known to tolerate higher temperatures, they do best in areas where the water remains below 70°F. Rainbow trout are carnivores, but not exclusively piscivorous. They feed on a wide variety of prey including insects, crustaceans, mollusks and fish. At hatcheries, they are raised on prepared feed pellets.

Rainbow trout are native to North America west of the Rockies from Alaska into northwestern Mexico. Introductions have extended the range to include the Great Lakes region, south central Canada and portions of the Great Plains east of the Rockies, and southwestern Mexico. In Texas, high temperatures prevent reproduction or even over-summer survival in most areas, though some may survive in tailrace areas below large dams such as at Canyon Reservoir. The only self-sustaining population in the state exists in McKittrick Canyon in the Guadalupe Mountains.

Since rainbow trout generally do not reproduce in Texas, and are unable to survive through the summer in most areas, the species is primarily used in winter put-and-take fisheries. Each winter, several

hundred thousand rainbows are stocked in community fishing lakes (CFL) and *Neighborhood Fishin'* lakes around the state. On occasion, banks are lined with anglers eager to catch their limit immediately after trout are stocked.

Common tackle used

The best way to appreciate the fight of these feisty fish is by using light tackle. Light tackle is also beneficial; as these fish are sight predators, meaning that heavy gear in clear waters may spook them when they encounter it. If something appears unnatural or excessive, chances are they will avoid biting it. Avoid heavy line, large snap swivels, weights, wire leaders and hooks, or a combination of these (normally used in saltwater applications). The main idea is to keep it simple. The following are some basic recommendations for gear:

- Rods – Light to ultra-light action rods in the 5- to 6.5-ft range are the best fit for the job.

- Reels – For beginners, a closed-face spinning reel (push-button) is always an easy way to start. They are now available in several sizes; but a



smaller size designed for light line is desired in this case. For the more advanced user, an open-face spinning reel is the best way to go. Make sure to use a reel suitable for the rod size and type of line expected to use.



- Line – As mentioned light line is desired for these trout. Line ranging from 4- to 10-pound test is preferred. You want some strength to fight this feisty fish and prevent breakage, but in clear waters, the lighter line is harder to see by the fish. So 6- to 8-pound test is ideal to combine the features needed. If really light line is preferred to “finesse the fish,” make sure you have a good drag on your reel to help relieve the tension on the line when needed.

- Weights – Sinker weights help the bait sink to a desired level in the water column; they also aid your casting distance. Splitshot weights are most common





for this application since they are easily attached and detached from the fishing line. Egg sinkers and drop sinkers can be used as well but rigged differently. Rule of thumb is to use

the smallest weight possible needed to reach your target and sink effectively. Avoid placing weights too close to your baited hook to prevent spooking the fish.



- Hooks – There are hundreds of types and brands available when you shop for hooks. For this application, it is best to stay with small bait hooks. There are specialized #10 and #12 circle hooks for trout available at tackle shops. These are popular because the extremely short shank allows for the hook to become completely covered when used with certain baits. However they are not suited for other types of popular baits used to catch trout. For most cases, longer shank bait hooks ranging between #8 to #4 are preferred, with a #6 being ideal. The longer shank also allows for easier removal.



- Bobbers – These are used to suspend the bait at a desired depth within the water column, where fish may be prone to biting. These also



provide a visual aid to alert when a fish bites. While very useful at



times, these may become unfavorable in rivers and windy conditions, when water movement can drift the bait out of your target area. While rainbow trout normally swim close to the bottom, they will strike bait located throughout the water column. If a bobber is used, it's best to select a small one.

Common baits used

As mentioned, rainbow trout naturally feed on many food types, including prepared fish feed when raised in hatcheries. Therefore anything that mimics their natural or prepared food preferences tend to work well. The following are examples of baits used for rainbow trout:



- Kernel corn
- Cheese balls
- Salmon eggs
- Wigglers
- Cut nightcrawlers
- Manufactured trout bites or trout nibbles
- Crickets
- Mealworms
- Dough bait



Common lures used

For those who enjoy fishing at a more active pace, artificial lures provide an array of options for the avid angler. When the trout are active, these lures may help achieve great success and allow anglers to cover more water when these fish are moving around. Stocked fish average 10 to 12 inches in length in Texas waters, and they feed on smaller prey, which means smaller lures (especially those designed for ultra-light fishing gear) are most efficient. The following are common lure types used to catch rainbow trout:



- Inline spinners
- Spoons
- Curly tail jigs or grubs
- Bucktail jigs
- Swim shads
- Tiny crankbaits



Rigging for trout fishing

Once again, the most important rule is to keep it simple when rigging your gear for trout fishing. The following examples illustrate how to rig the tackle recommended above:

- A. Splitshot rig (If needed, attach a bobber to the line above the splitshot to achieve desired depth.)



- B. Egg sinker rig (A small swivel and a bead is used here.)



C. Drop sinker rig



Simple knot tying techniques

Palomar Knot

The easiest to tie and the strongest knot known to hold terminal tackle.

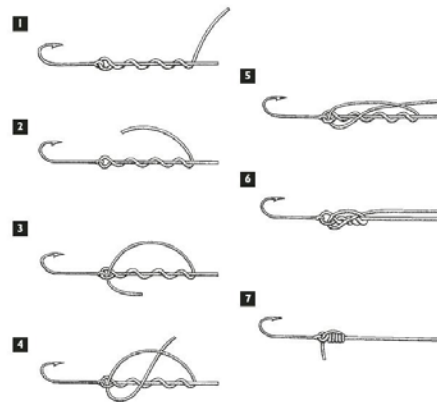
1. Double 4 inches of line to form a loop and pass the loop through the eye of the fishing hook. Let the hook hang loose.
2. Tie an overhand knot in the doubled line. Don't twist or tighten line.
3. Pull the loop far enough to pass it completely over the hook.
4. Wet the line.
5. Hold the hook carefully, and pull the loose end with the standing line slowly to tighten the loose end.



Improved Clinch Knot

An "old standby" known as the fisherman's knot.

1. Pass the line through the hook eye and, with the tag end, make 5 turns around the standing line.
2. Insert the loose end of the line between the eye and the first loop formed.
3. Bring the end through the large second loop formed.
4. Wet the line and tighten the knot slowly while holding the loose end of the line end between thumb and index finger so the knot is partly closed before it's secured against the eye. Clip the loose end of the line.



Some tips to consider when trout fishing stocked waters

- Arrive early to stock sites on stocking days.
- Maintain a safe and courteous distance from fellow anglers.
- Have an array of baits or lures available.
- When harvesting trout, have ice available to keep catch fresh.

An easy way to clean and prepare trout for a meal

1. Rinse and scrape small scales off the trout.
2. With filet knife, cut a slit from the anal opening up towards the gill opening along mid-body (ventrally).
3. Pull out all internal organs through slit and discard.
4. Cut off the head and rinse off all blood or scales from open body.
5. If desired, cut off tail and fins.
6. Once cleaned thoroughly, the trout is ready to cook. Many easy recipes are available in the internet.
7. Once trout is completely cooked, you can pull out the backbone and ribs easily from the meat.





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