

## **Small lures for Bass and Bluegill (Bream): Fishing with kids/Fun fishing**

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Small artificial lures catch more fish, and provide much more activity (bites, attempted strikes) than large lures. Young children want the chance to catch a fish. They want something going after their lure or bait. This makes small lures especially fun for young children (or grown-ups) who are simply interested in having activity when they go fishing. Normally, the larger the lure the larger the fish you may catch. However, even when using small artificial lures you will find that you will catch your share of 2 ½ to 4 lb. bass.

On occasion, I will feel 3 or 4 strikes or bumps at my lure on one retrieve. Other times, I may see my lure move sideways which indicates a fish has tried to bite it. Probably the most exciting event is when you see the flash of the side of bass turning in order to strike your lure. This raises your level of interest. It also makes you focus on what it takes to catch a fish, which children are quite adept at learning. Grown-ups refer to this as “pattern fishing,” young children just want to talk about what happened, e.g. “I felt a bump which means a fish tried to get my lure.” They want to talk about they did right to catch the fish. Sometimes they will advise you what you should be doing so that you can have more success.

There are three alternatives for trying to catch fish: live bait, dead bait (or things like hot dogs) or artificial lures. Live bait such as red wiggler worms or nightcrawler worms are tried and true baits for bass and bluegill. However, small artificial lures can have several advantages over live bait. You normally don't lose your lure when fish bite at it, so you don't have to waste time putting on a new bait. You can check more water more quickly with artificial baits. Live baits used with or without a bobber tend to stay in a small area while waiting on a fish to find your bait and bite. With small artificial lures, you can quickly check a wide area by retrieving your lure through a stretch of water as you are searching for the fish, then cast again in that area once you have some activity. Your goal is to find the fish, and not waste time at a spot where there are no fish waiting on a fish to find your bait. Because you are not wasting time, you make better use of the limited time you have to fish, and will tend to catch many more fish in that limited time than you otherwise would have when using live bait.

There is another important reason for learning how to catch bass and bluegill while using small artificial lures rather than live bait (worms). Worms in boxes need to stay refrigerated, small artificial lures don't. My wife always objected to my keeping boxes of worms in our refrigerator, and it did not seem to matter whether they were new or used worms.

For grandparents who want their grandchildren to be able to catch fish when they come to visit, or for grown-ups who just would like to have a fun experience fishing, below is a photograph showing examples of small artificial lures that are quite effective in catching bass and bluegill. I tested all of these lures on the morning of 4-26-20 and caught at least two bass or bluegill on each (except for the two crankbaits and the spoon toward the lower left portion of the photo) before changing to another lure. I had many other strikes at my lures, or lost fish which I only had on briefly. On a prior recent afternoon, I caught 26 bass and 4 bluegill at one pond (primarily on 3" wacky worm, 1/32 oz. spinner bait and a 1/16 oz. white twister tail grub), then went to another pond and caught 10 bass on a top-water bait (Pop-R). You can count on these lures to catch fish. However, you do need to keep in mind that fish are "finicky" so you may need to try several different lures to find the one they really want that day at that place.

Note that I placed a quarter among these lures for scale. Also note that the paddle tail swim bait that I had been using has had its tail bitten off. This usually indicates a strike by a bluegill rather than a bass, but at a minimum it indicates you had a fish try to get your lure. Also note that the maribue jig is damaged, the 1/32 oz. spinner bait has had paint knocked off the head of this bait, the 1/8 oz. paddle tail grub has been pulled backward, and the tail of the 1/16 oz. tube grub is missing some of the trailers. These are all definite indications that fish have struck those lures.

Note that there are several lures which are similar in appearance – Paddle tail swim bait, 1/8 oz. Maribue jig, 1/8 oz. Paddle tail grub, 1/16 oz. Tube grub and ¼ oz. Twin twister tail grub. Small jigs, grubs or paddle tail swim baits are always an excellent choice to try partly because you can work them through both deep and shallow water. If you cast into deeper water, before you begin to retrieve these lures let them sink for several seconds. You want to let the lure sink down toward the bottom of the pond because in deep water fish tend to be near the bottom (if they were shallow in deep water, they are in jeopardy of attack by a larger predator fish). Use the "count-down method" by which you can count "Thousand one, Thousand two ...." while the lure is sinking. If you reach a count of 10 before you begin your retrieve and find that you have caught debris from the bottom, next cast count to 6 before you begin to retrieve. If at 6 you do not catch debris from the bottom, then on next cast count to 8 before beginning to retrieve. You will soon realize which count (e.g., 6 or 8) will allow you to begin your retrieve without snagging debris on the bottom. As your lure gets close to the bank, raise your rod tip and reel a little faster in order to avoid snagging on the bottom as your lure gets into shallower water.

A collateral benefit of using the “count-down method” is that you will quickly begin to realize which are the deeper and shallower portions of the ponds you fish.

During my testing of small lures on 4-26-20 I did not catch any fish while using the crankbaits or the spoon, however, don't let that make you think they are not excellent lures. I only cast each of the lures for a very limited period of time. In Tennessee, where I learned to fish, I caught thousands of fish on crankbaits and spoons.

Because small artificial lures are very light in weight, they may not cast very far. So it is very important to match your equipment (rod, reel, line) to the lure you are using in order to maximize the distance that you can cast these lures. I can cast the 3” wacky worm, 1/8 oz. grubs, 1/8 oz. in-line spinner, 1/8 oz. spinner bait, and one of the topwater lures (Tiny Torpedo) with the medium light rod using 20 lb. braided line which is the equipment I normally use for my regular fishing. However, when you want to cast the other lures, you will want to use lighter equipment such as the 6 ½ foot ultra-light rod with 8 lb. test monofilament line that I was using when I caught the fish on 4-26-20. However, I prefer to use an ultra-light or light action rod with 10 lb. Power Pro braided line rather than monofilament line primarily because the braided line casts better and has better abrasion resistance. The longer the rod the farther you can cast a lure, so use a rod that is at least 6 feet long (7' would be preferable). You can choose a rod that is in two pieces which can be helpful if you have limited space to transport your rods. Using a two-piece rod could allow you to have a much longer rod than might otherwise be possible.

If shopping for a rod, you can look along the shaft of the rod for identifying information. For example, the rod I was using during my tests on 4-26-20 shows “St. Croix” as the maker of the rod, and “PFS69ULF” as the model number, “6' 9” Ultra-light power” so you know it is an ultra-light rod, “Fast action” which tells you that the rod tends to easily bend only toward the tip of the rod rather than throughout the whole length of the rod, “SCII & SCVI Graphite” which tells you it is made of graphite material (a very sensitive type of rod), and “2-6 lb. 1/32 -3/16 oz.” which tells you that it is designed to allow you to cast lures weighing between 1/32 and 3/16 oz. and utilize 2 to 6 lb. monofilament line. Another rod I often use for this type of fishing shows “Triumph – St. Croix” which tells you that this is a rod from the Triumph series of rods made by St. Croix., “TRS60LF” which is the model number for this particular rod, “6' Light power” which tells you it is a light rod that is 6' 0” long, “Fast action” which again tells you that the rod tends to easily bend toward the end of the rod rather than throughout the whole length of the rod, “SCII Graphite” telling you it is a sensitive graphite rod, and “4-8 lb. 1/16-5/16 oz.” which tells you that it is designed to allow you to cast 1/16 to 5/16 oz. lures using 4 to 8 lb. monofilament line. At the present time, I have 10 lb. Power Pro braided line on this rod which is equivalent to 2 lb. monofilament line. It casts much farther, and is stronger, more abrasion resistant, and more sensitive than any monofilament line I could use.

Sometimes, I use 15 lb. Power Pro braided line on this rod.

I use Shimano Stradic 2500 reels on both of these rods. If you are purchasing a rod and reel, put your money into the reel. Shimano makes excellent reels that are very smooth and durable. All of mine are over 15 years old and continue to work great. St. Croix rods can be pricey although the Triumph series is a lower end series.

There are many good rods out there. For fishing small artificial lures, an ultra-light graphite rod with a fast action tip is normally best, one that is about 6' 6" in length (preferably longer if possible). If you look at the shaft of a rod, you will see a model number such as "PFS69ULF." This will quickly allow you to confirm the type of rod you are looking at – "69" means the rod is 6' 9" long, "UL" means the rod is ultra-light in power, and "F" means it has a fast action tip.

When fishing with a young child, look for places that are open so that you can avoid catching the lure in a tree limb during a cast. For a similar reason, look for places that don't have lots of tall weeds or brush along the edge of the pond. Many of our ponds have pond scum (duckweed) on the surface, often having been blown by the wind against the banks. Until the child is proficient at casting and also at lifting the lure out of the water before the lure gets too close to debris, pond scum, weeds, or bushes, look for "clean banks."

Most importantly, when fishing with children, always be alert to the possibility of an alligator being attracted to a fish flopping on the surface of the water while it is being brought in. You as the adult need to focus on checking for that potential threat even while assisting the child in getting the fish in or simply enjoying watching the thrill the child is experiencing.





**1/8 oz. Buzz bait**

**Twitch bait**



**Tail bitten off**



**Paddle tail swim bait**



**1/8 oz. Maribue jig**

**Topwater (Pop-R)**



**1/8 oz. Paddle tail grub**



**1/16 oz. Spinner bait**



**1/32 oz. Spinner bait**



**1/8 oz. In-line spinner (Joe's Flys)**



**1/16 oz. Tube grub**



**1/4 oz. Twin twister tail grub**



**Crankbait**



**Crankbait**



**Spoon (Little Cleo)**

**3" Wacky worm (Yum Dinger) with 2/0 Extra wide gap worm hook hooked through middle of wacky worm**

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**Topwater (Tiny Torpedo)**