



DID YOU KNOW?

Ice needs to be at least four inches thick to reliably support the weight of the average adult — if it's new, clear ice. Double that thickness is needed if the ice is old or white.

ICE FISHING 101. Counter the cold to pull up more piscine.

“What’s nice about ice fishing is you don’t need a lot of gear to get started,” says Jarrid Houston of Houston’s Guide Service in Duluth, Minnesota. A life-long ice fisher, Houston says you only six items to start reeling in fish on a frozen lake.

- 1. Auger:** Ice drills come in a variety of styles, from hand-cranked to propane-powered augers. Whichever your pick, you’ll need an auger to drill a six- to eight-inch-round hole through the ice.
- 2. Ice Suit:** An insulated, weather-proof ice suit is critical to staying warm on the ice. With builtin flotation devices, these suits also provide an extra level of safety.
- 3. Portable fish house:** While ice fishing might conjure up visions of heated wooden shanties, Houston is a proponent of the modern “hub shack” (a pop-up canvas tent with built-in chairs) and flip-style shack (a sled with canvas that flips over you). “You can still go out and sit on a bucket, but you may only last an hour,” says Houston. “With a fish house, you can stay out all day. And
- 4. Rigging:** How you rig your line depends on how active you want to be. With a “tip-up,” you just drop your line and leave it until the flag signals a fish hit. The line and hook attach directly to the tip-up, and you reel fish in by hand. “Jigging” is a more active approach — twitching the line to give the bait some action, which hopefully attracts fish. You can use the same reel you’d use in the summer but with a shorter rod, about 26-inches long.
- 5. Bait:** The trend in ice fishing is to use soft plastic bait instead of the real thing because you can reuse it, you don’t need to keep it alive, and it’s easier to handle. “Smaller is better in winter because the fish are eating microorganisms,” says Houston.
- 6. Electronics:** Houston is a huge proponent of using sonar (a device that uses sound to “see” underwater) for ice fishing. “It’s a game-changer. You’ll catch 90 percent more fish because you’ll know what depth they’re at, whether it’s hard bottom or vegetation below you, or if there’s a drop-off.”

if you’re not catching anything, you can move it quickly.”

If you’re wondering how to get a 30-inch walleye through an 8-inch hole in the ice, Houston says to be patient. Typically, a fish will dive three or four times as it gets near the hole. When it’s finally tired, you can reach down and grab it by the gill plate to pull it vertically out of the hole.

If you’re planning to let the fish go, do it quickly — within 30 seconds of landing it. Hold its tail as you circulate water through its gills. As the fish revives, it will kick, then go. “You pulled the fish out of 32-degree water, but the air might be zero degrees with a 20 mph wind,” says Houston. “It’s important to get a fish back in the water as soon as possible, otherwise its eyes may freeze. That’s another reason for a shelter. It’s gentler on the fish.”

Mind your own safety, too. Go ice fishing with a buddy. Bring a rope in case one of you inadvertently goes through the ice. And store your cell phone in a waterproof container in case of emergency.

An IWLA member based in Red Lodge, Montana, Lisa Densmore Ballard is an award-winning writer and photographer who spends much of the winter ice fishing. www.LisaDensmore.com