

1. Overview

You must follow national and local rules (byelaws) when freshwater fishing with a rod and line in England and Wales.

These rules are aimed at protecting fish stocks and making fisheries sustainable.

Freshwater fish include salmon, trout, coarse fish and eels.

! You must have a [rod licence](#) to fish in England and Wales if you're aged 12 or older.

Find out which rules apply to your area

England and Wales are broken down into regions that each have their own rules. National rules are included in each set of local rules.

There may also be rules for privately owned bodies of water, eg private fishing lakes.

Read the rules for your area

Read the local byelaws for your area to find out the:

- areas in your region where you're not allowed to fish
- closed seasons (when you can't fish) which apply to particular types of water and fish within your region
- sort of tackle you can use for certain fish in your region
- size of fish you can keep

[Read the local byelaws](#) for your region - there are different [regulations for Wales](#).

2. When and where you can fish

'Close seasons' are seasons when you can't fish for some types of fish on certain types of water.

For example, you can't fish for coarse fish on any river in England and Wales from 15 March to 15 June.

Reservoirs, lakes and ponds ('enclosed stillwaters') and canals

You can fish for coarse fish, eels, rainbow trout and brown trout on most enclosed stillwaters and canals all year.

[Read the local byelaws](#) to check your area.

Rivers, streams, drains or waterways (other than canals)

You can't fish for coarse fish and eels on rivers from the 15 March to 15 June (you can fish for eel in some areas - [read the local byelaws](#)).

You need to [read the local byelaws](#) for close seasons for salmon, brown trout and rainbow trout on rivers.

! Privately owned bodies of water can also have their own close seasons.

Lock and weir fishing on the Thames

You must have an additional permit to [fish locks and weirs on the Thames](#).

Game fishing during the coarse fish close season

You can fish for salmon, trout and other game fish during the coarse fish close season. You have to use certain types of lures and baits in some areas however.

Midlands, Yorkshire, and the north-east and north-west of England

You can only use natural or artificial fly, minnow, worm, shrimp, prawn, sand eel or artificial lures during close season.

South-east of England

You can only use artificial fly. In the Thames area, you can apply for permission from the Environment Agency to also use minnow caught in a minnow trap if used on the same waters.

Wales or the south-west of England

Read the [local byelaws for Wales](#) or the [south-west of England](#).

3. Fish size and catch limits

You're only allowed to keep a certain amount of the fish you catch.

These fish must also be of a certain size.

You must return fish you can't keep to the water unharmed.

! You're committing an offence and can be fined if you take too many fish or fish that aren't the right size.

Size limits

Whether you can keep a fish depends on:

- the type of fish
- where you're fishing

[Read the local byelaws](#) for your region.

You must measure fish from the tip of the snout to the fork of the tail.

Catch limits

There's a daily limit on the number of fish you can take.

Coarse (freshwater) fish

Each day you can only take from rivers:

- 1 pike (up to 65cm)
- 2 grayling (30cm to 38cm)
- 15 small fish (up to 20cm) including barbel, chub, common bream, common carp, crucian carp, dace, perch, rudd, silver bream, roach, smelt and tench

! Any eels you catch (except conger eels) must be released alive.

You can also take:

- minor or 'tiddler' species, such as gudgeon
- non-native species
- ornamental varieties of native species like ghost or koi carp

! You can be fined if you remove fish from privately-owned waters without written permission from the owner.

Salmon and trout

[Read your local byelaws](#) for the local daily limit of salmon and trout you can take.

! You can be fined for selling rod-caught salmon or sea trout in England and Wales.

4. Tackle you can use

There are rules on how many rods you can use at a time, and the types of lures, bait, nets and weights.

[Read the local byelaws](#) for your region.

Fishing rods

The [number of rods you can use at the same time](#) depends on the water you're fishing in and the fish you're trying to catch.

You must make sure that the distance between the butts of the outermost rods isn't more than 3 metres when fishing with multiple rods and lines.

! It's illegal to leave a rod and line in the water unattended or over which you don't have sufficient control.

Lures, bait and tackle

In England and Wales you must not:

- use crayfish as bait
- use another fish you've taken as bait unless you're doing so on the same waters where you caught it
- keep fish you've foul hooked (caught with a hook puncturing anywhere but the fish's mouth or throat) - these must be returned alive
- use a gaff (a pole with a large hook at the end) or a tailer (a loop of cable or wire at the end of a pole)

Before 16 June you can only use artificial lure and artificial fly to fish for salmon, which must be returned unharmed to the water.

! [Dispose of your tackle safely](#) to avoid harm to wildlife.

Lead weights

You can only use lead weights if they're .06 grams or less or more than 28.35 grams. This means lead shot weights from size 14 to size 8 and lead weights over 1

ounce.

Lead is toxic to birds, so if you're using lead dust shot make sure the containers are spill proof.

Keepnets, keepsacks and landing nets

Keepnets must:

- have no knotted meshes or meshes of metallic material
- have holes smaller than 25mm
- be more than 2 metres long
- have supporting rings or frames less than 40cm apart and more than 12cm in circumference

A keepsack must be:

- made from a soft, dark coloured, non-abrasive and water permeable fabric
- at least 120cm by 90cm if rectangular
- at least 150cm by 30cm by 40cm if used with a frame
- used to hold no more than one fish at a time

Landing nets

You can't use a landing net with any meshes that are knotted or made of metallic material.

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