

# Looking After Your Trout

## ...Handle with Care



### Caring For Sports Fish

Whether we choose to keep a trout as a food source or release it, we have a responsibility to treat it with respect. Catching a fish is not simply about the moment of capture; it is about how we handle the fish from the time it is landed until its final fate.

If you decide to keep a trout, you should recognise it as a valuable source of food. It should be dispatched quickly and humanely, handled carefully, and kept in a way that protects the quality of the flesh. Taking a fish means accepting responsibility for using it well and avoiding unnecessary waste.

If you elect to release a trout, keep in mind that the fish is a living animal. Good release practices mean minimising the time the trout spends out of the water, handling it gently and with wet hands, supporting its body properly, and returning it to the water as quickly as possible. The aim is to give the fish the best possible chance of swimming away healthy. When handled properly, released fish have a very high survival rate.

Ultimately, the angler is responsible for making an ethical choice and for the way the fish is treated. Whether a trout becomes food or is returned to the water, respect should guide every part of the process.

**TIP** Don't use too tight a line otherwise you will have to fight the fish for longer and that takes a toll.

### What To Do

Looking after the trout you catch begins with your equipment.

- **Use the heaviest line you can get away with.** Too light a line means you will have to fight the fish for longer and that takes a toll - an exhausted fish has much less chance of surviving.
- **Aim to land your fish quickly.** Modern reels have great drags, so make the most of these and the rod's leverage to get the trout close enough to net.

- **Use a net to land your fish**, preferably a knotless one.
- **Keep the trout in the net** and in the water while releasing it.
- **Unhook the fish gently**, preferably with long nosed pliers.
- **Work quickly** and if at all possible avoid touching the fish at all.
- **If you want a photo, make it quick** and get the fish back into the water without delay.
- **Wet and cool your hands** before handling the fish and consider using gloves.
- **Ideally, take the photo of the fish still in the water.**
- **If you have to hold the fish, do it gently** with one hand around the tail and the other carefully cradling the fish.
- **Keep your hands, hooks and anything else away from the trout's gills.**

### What Not To Do

- **Don't drag the fish onto shore** and leave it flapping around on hot rocks, this will kill it.
- **The same goes for boat anglers** - a hot deck will kill a trout.
- **Don't touch the trout's gills.** If your fish is bleeding from the gills, kill it humanely and take it home for a meal.
- **Don't squeeze the fish**, especially around its belly.
- **Don't keep the trout out of water** any longer than necessary. Remember, fish don't breathe any better in air than we do underwater.
- **Don't bring fish up from deep water too quickly when lake fishing from boats.**

**TIP** Ideally, take the photo of the fish still in the water. Fish don't breathe any better in the air than we do underwater.

## How to Harvest a Trout

Harvesting a trout, salmon, or perch for the table is one of the most rewarding aspects of fishing.

If you intend to keep a fish, it is important to dispatch it quickly and humanely. A firm blow to the top of the head immediately behind the eyes is the most common and effective method. This blow can be achieved with a suitably sized rock or sturdy fishing tool. Once dispatched, the fish should be bled by cutting or removing the gills. This improves flesh quality and longevity and therefore eating quality.

If possible, gut the fish as soon as practical and keep it cool. Placing the fish on ice or in a chilly bin will help maintain its condition, particularly during warm weather.

Keep in mind that not every fish is worth keeping. Before harvesting a trout, consider its condition and suitability for eating. Brightly coloured fish in good condition are the best fish to harvest, and these are not always the largest fish. Thin fish, fish in poor condition, or post-spawning fish are often better released.

## How to Release a Trout

Sometimes you may want to release a fish that you catch. Releasing fish correctly improves their chances of survival and helps maintain quality fisheries.

### When releasing a sports fish:

- Land the fish as quickly as practical.
- Keep the fish in the water whenever possible.
- Wet your hands before handling the fish to protect its delicate slime layer.
- Avoid touching the gills or eyes, as these areas are particularly sensitive.
- Use forceps or pliers to remove the hook carefully.
- Minimise the amount of time the fish spends out of the water.

If you would like to take a photograph, have the camera ready before lifting the fish from the water and return it promptly afterwards.

Before release, hold the fish gently facing into the current until it regains its balance and is able to swim away.

Careful handling can make a significant difference to the survival of released fish and helps ensure they remain available for other anglers to enjoy in the future.