

Fish Topic by Species

Shad

Fishing for River Shad

Fishing for shad is a great way to start the spring fishing season and this article should help you to learn how to fish for shad on river waters. Shad are not that big, usually between about a 1 1/2 lbs. to 6lbs., but they fight like they are three times their size! They catch the current with their wide bodies drag better be set right or you will be up for a re-rig. The best thing is that a lot of days you catch several per hour and every one is a challenge. By the end of a good shad fishing day, your 'you-know-what' has been kicked and your arm is tired and cramped. Of course, you can't wait to do it all over again the next day!

The shad migrate up the rivers to spawn in typically mid-May and up to early July. The old timers say that when the white cottonwood seed tufts are blowing in the wind that it is time to fish for shad and it has some validity. It is best to fish them when the wind is down since little more than a breeze plays havoc with four to six pound test line and makes the bites hard to see or feel. Upper-river wading onto a gravel bar is a great way to fish for shad if you are up to it. If fishing from a boat, troll very slowly and cast at ninety degrees to the current, allowing your line to sink and gradually and bounce your jig-head just above the bottom.

Push the "Control" key and click your cursor on the link to see the following demonstration of fishing from a boat for shad by pro fishing guide Kevin Brock www.youtube.com/watch?v=UqKN-5Mh3bc

The most popular jig for shad is the little rubber "mini-twister" on a small jig-head in green or yellow shad-dart. Many shad anglers prefer the chartreuse color with sparkles in it, but make sure to take a few other colors as well. Hardly anyone uses it, but on shady days the salmon-colored one works when the green no longer gets hits. Depending on the river current, keep adding split-shots up from the jig about a foot or so. You want the weight to bring your jig slightly above the bottom as that is where the fish are. You will want to tap the bottom by pulling up your line once in a while in your drifts but not too often. Just try to stay off of it and reel in slowly and keep repeating your casts. The fish are constantly on the move and will appear in schools, then disappear, then return in a matter of minutes.

With either spin-fishing or fly fishing, usually you will want to find a gravel bar that jets into the river, hopefully with no snags where you are fishing and wade out. Cast your line out to about a "10 o'clock" position (upstream) and let the jig and line sink a few seconds until it is about straight out in front of you, at which time you take the slack up in the line and hold your pole tip up a little so you can see its action during the balance of the drift down-stream. You will let the line drift until nearly straight down from you and then reel in and repeat the motion.

Sometimes when the shad hit it feels like your line has caught on a snag and it pulls steady and other times they bite so light that you just see a little dip on the tip of your pole. Every day it seems the bite is different. You might be sitting next to your buddy one day with identical rigging and you catch ten and he catches one and the next day you are the lone-bagger.

Usually shad are released but now and then some folks like to smoke them, which turns-out great. However, they are pretty oily fish like the rest of the herring-family they are related to, and are quite bony. Others like to cook their shad-roe or par-boil the roe that has been coated with seasoned-bread and quickly fried. If you pressure-cook cleaned whole shad, the bones become soft and opaque and eatable as is. Another alternative is to remove the meat along with the softened bones and with a spoon discard

the remainder of the fish. Try mixing the meat with garlic, parsley, chives, a little bread, salt, and pepper to form shad patties and fry them in vegetable oil to a golden brown. Fried shad patties are delicious!

Anyway, if you have never fished shad, give it a try. It is a blast!

American Shad Fishing in the Central Valley—Bass Jack Naves

We hope you have been enjoying spring time fishing for trout, stripers, and bass. For a fun change-of-pace try your skills for fishing for American Shad that are now coming into our major rivers. American Shad make their way up Central Valley rivers and streams each spring for their annual spawning run. These tough fighting fish have been called "little tarpon" for their fighting abilities and are pursued by sports anglers across Northern California. Native to the Northeastern United States, American Shad have been introduced to the west coast and are now found in large numbers in the Sacramento and Colombia River systems. The best time to target shad in Northern California is during May and June during the tail end of the striper run.

American Shad are relatives of the herring and spend most of their lives at sea. The males average between two to four pounds while the females can reach up to six or seven pounds. They are oily, bony fish and are mostly enjoyed as a sports fish, not as table fare. If you decide to keep some shad, they are really good when smoked. Their roe is considered a delicacy by many Asian cultures. American Shad shouldn't be confused with Threadfin Shad, which also live in the California Delta system. Threadfin shad only reach about six inches in length and are commonly used as bait for striped bass and sturgeon in the delta.

Most people like to use about a six to seven foot medium rod with a fast tip. Try to go light without getting too light. Ultra-light panfish and crappie rigs are a little too light to bring in shad out of the current. A light trout rod is what you are looking for. Go with a small to medium sized spinning reel. Most people stick with spinning reels because the lures we will be using are light and need to be casted far. One important factor is a smooth drag. Shad have soft mouths and we'll be using a really loose drag setting. A jerky drag leads to lost fish. I like to use six pound test P-Line Fluoroclear. It is a hybrid cross between monofilament and fluorocarbon. There are several lures to choose from when shad fishing. The traditional shad dart works, but here in Northern California most people prefer to use crappie jigs. A 1/32 oz. crappie jig with a 1" curly tail grub is the most popular lure.

Colors can vary from day to day. Be sure to carry lots of different color combinations to see what the fish are hitting on that particular day. Keep changing your colors until you find what the fish are interested in. The standby color for the jig head is red, followed by chartreuse or pink. For the grub, champagne is the top color, followed by chartreuse, white, and pink. If you buy a shad dart that comes with a tail (like the ones shown here), trim it off or the lure will be too big. One thing to keep in mind is that shad do not feed in fresh water. Much like salmon, they stop feeding once they reach fresh water and begin their spawning run. They strike out of aggression or out of instinct.

Shad can be found throughout the Sacramento River system. In the lower section of the river, Clarksburg, Freeport, Garcia Bend, Discovery Park and Verona are all popular bank fishing venues. The American, Feather and upper Sacramento Rivers are also great places to catch shad. The faster running, shallow stretches of rivers are more popular with jet boats and anglers using waders to access fishing sites.

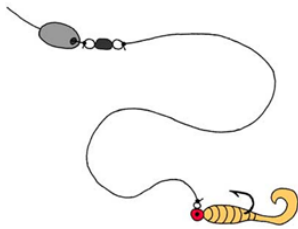
Deep Water If you are fishing in an area that is wide and deep, you simply need to start fishing to see where they are holding. If you are fishing of the bank in slow deep water like the Freeport area, start out by casting upstream at about a 20 degree angle. Let it sink for a few seconds and slowly retrieve your lure as it sinks to the bottom. Vary your retrieve to see what the fish are looking for that particular day.

Sometimes the fish want a medium or fast retrieve, while other times they want a slow retrieve. You can also vary the amount of time you allow the lure to sink before you start your retrieve. I usually start with a five second count and go up and down from there until I find where the fish are holding. When the lure gets near the shore, reel quickly to avoid getting snagged.

Shallow Water If you are fishing in shallow water, like the upper American River, you'll need a lot less weight. In shallow stretches of the river, shad tend to hold in water that is five to seven feet deep. Look for water that has a decent amount of current running through it. Use the split shot or slinky weight setups shown above.

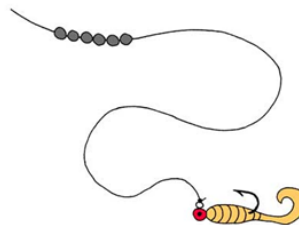
The Strike Shad tend to strike the lure fairly lightly. You might feel an abrupt bump followed by pressure. If you feel pressure, use a short quick hook set and start reeling. As I mentioned earlier, shad have very soft mouths and are easy to lose if you apply too much pressure. A huge hook set will tear their skin and cause you to lose the fish. Be sure to keep a really loose drag on your reel. Your goal when fighting a shad is to keep light and steady pressure on the fish at all times. When the fish make a run, let your drag do its job. It should take several minutes to land each shad. Times that shad will bite can be unpredictable. Most people fish for shad either at mid-morning or late in the afternoon. Sometimes shad will bite like crazy right before dark. Overcast days seem to be good because the shad move up higher in the water column.

Practice catch and release, and good luck! Be sure to visit BassJack.com



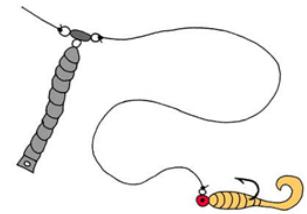
Deep Water Boat or Bank Setup

You'll need to add some weight to get your lure down into the current. When fishing in deep or slow water, tie about a three foot leader attached to a swivel. Above the swivel add a 1/4 to 1 ounce barrel sinker.



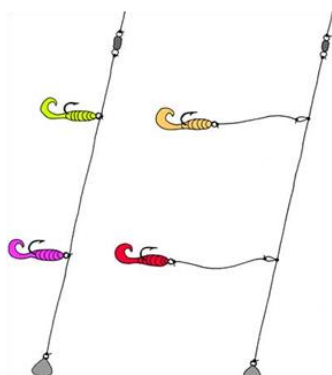
Shallow Water Boat Setup

In shallow water, you can simply add about four to six split shots about three feet above your lure. This method works best from a boat because using it from the bank will ensure that you get snagged on the rocks often.



Shallow Water Boat or Bank Setup

In shallow water you can replace the split shots with a 1/8 to 3/4 ounce slinky weight. This will help to keep you out of the rocks.



Deep Water Boat Setup

When fishing deep water from a boat, you can tie a weight to the bottom of your rig and then tie several grubs about one foot apart above the weight. You can tie direct using a Palomar knot (left) and your rig will resemble a drop-shotting rig used for bass fishing. Alternately, you can use a dropper loop like a surf rig (left).