

Backwoods Home Magazine

practical ideas for self-reliant living



Remembering
Sept. 11, 2001

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Make your own effective fishing tackle while you save money and recycle scrap

by Rev. J.D. Hooker

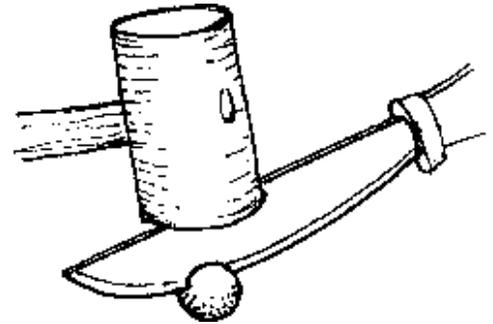
My long time friend Hearold Ruby passed away. Death came as sort of a reprieve. He'd been terribly sick and utterly miserable for years and he was worn clear out. He was ready to go on home to rest.

Hearold never made much money in his life and he never was much of a hand when it came to hunting, shooting, or a hundred other important things. But he was the most fantastic fisherman I ever met. He was a live, walking, talking fishing encyclopedia, able to "read the water" of any lake, river, pond, or stream, far easier than you can read this page. The man was a fishing marvel and he was always happy to share his treasury of angling lore, knowledge, and experience with anyone. But he's gone, so I won't get the opportunity to ask him anything else.

But most of what I do know about catching fish, including making much of my own fishing tackle, consists of bits of information gleaned from Hearold over the years. And though BHM's readers were never fortunate enough to have met Hearold Ruby, if you try your hand at making and using a few of these self-manufactured tackle varieties, you'll be glad that I did.

Sinkers

Let's start off with something really simple—producing your own lead fishing sinkers. At one time or another I've used almost every imaginable sort of scrap lead for this: used wheel weights, scrap lead plumbing pipe, broken battery cable ends, scrap linotype, and even used X-ray room shielding plates from a remodeled hospital. You name it, I've pretty well used it all, and all with equal success.



Split shot sinkers: Cast round lead balls in the sizes you need, then split them with a knife and mallet.

Making your own split shot is really simple, especially since I already have several different sizes of round ball molds for use with muzzle-loaders and hunting guns (.25" for #4 buck, .311" for 00 buck and a squirrel rifle, .440" for a Kentucky style rifle, .490" for a .50 cal. muzzle loader, etc.). I simply cast extra round balls in varying sizes, then use an old butcher knife and a wooden mallet to make a slice nearly through some of the lead balls. Through others, I drill a tiny hole all the way through and these I use as sliding sinkers.



Drilled bullet sinker

Bullet style sinkers are just about as easy to make. I drill a small hole through a bullet I've cast using any sort of regular bullet mold. Many times I'll even deliberately under-fill the mold to provide an even larger range of weights to choose from.

I think, however, that my favorite method for manufacturing lead fishing sinkers is to use a standard set of metal measuring spoons. I simply fill the desired sized measuring spoon with molten lead and then carefully touch the base of the spoon to the water in a bowl. Dump out the hardened chunk of lead, wipe the spoon dry, and repeat the procedure. Once you've cast a sufficient quantity of sinkers in this manner, drill a small hole near the edge of each one for affixing to a line.



I also learned to keep a small spool of regular solid core solder in my tackle box from which I can snip short sections for instant wrap-on style sinkers of any size.

Floats and bobbers

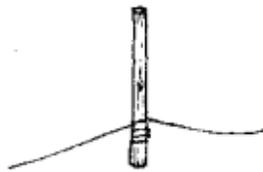
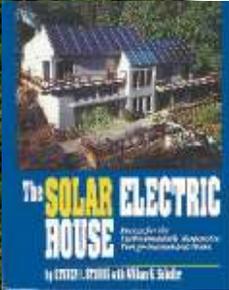


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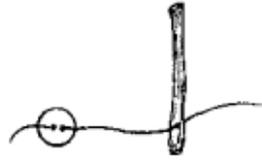
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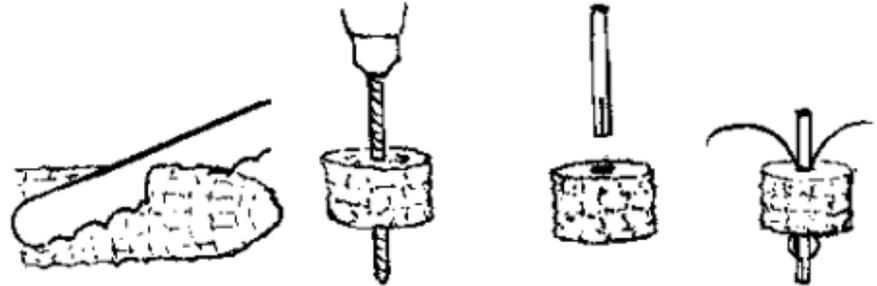


Floats and bobbers in any size are also readily fashioned by any angler with a minimum of DIY inclination. The simplest float is nothing more than a piece of twig tied in place on your line. Drill a hole near an end of a twig, or bind it on a wire loop, and add some high visibility paint, then thread a button onto your line as a bobber stop. This makes for a handy slip style float for easier casting.



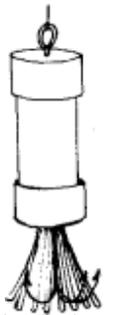
Stick bobbers, plain and slip-style

My own favorite type of user-built fishing bobber has to be what I call the "Hoosier Farm Cork Float." It is readily fashioned from a piece of dried corn cob. In fact, these floats work so well, and have such an unusual yet attractive appearance, that I've never understood why no one has started producing them commercially.



The "Hoosier Farm Cork Float" made from a corncob

To make up a few of these for yourself, use a piece of extra coarse sandpaper to smooth up the rough cob a little. (Smoothering up the cob on a belt sander will leave you with an appearance very like those commercially made corn-cob pipes and give you some really nice looking floats.) Then saw the corn cob into appropriate lengths. Drill 1/4" to 3/8" holes through the corn cob's center, then slot one end of a piece of dowel or smooth stick and insert this through the hole. Occasionally I'll use one of these "corks" without its dowel center as a slip type bobber.



A rattling lure, made with shot or BBs inside plumbing fittings

Unless you apply some sort of finish, these corn cob "corks" will gradually become water-logged and useless as you fish. So when I make up a batch of these, I just dip each one in any sort of exterior paint or varnish, and hang them up to dry—instant water proofing.

Of course, if for some odd reason you found corn cobs unobtainable, pieces of 3/4" dowel or suitably sized sticks will work just as well, though they will be slightly less buoyant than the corn cobs.

Besides floats and sinkers, a whole slew of different lures can also be very easily user-manufactured. These lures have the additional benefit of being tailored to specific requirements. This allows most, if not all, of your hand-crafted tackle to out-produce anything you could purchase.

Artificial worms

For bass fishing I used to buy a lot of relatively inexpensive plastic worms. Now, I braid my own artificial worms in a variety of lengths and thicknesses, from bulky acrylic yarn. While I'll admit that using a loose braid to produce fake worms probably doesn't end up saving me any money, I do catch more fish with them.



A braided worm

One method that really seems to work well is to add an extra color. For example, adding one strand of red and another of yellow, when braiding together a purple worm, makes it more effective.

Of course these braided worms can be rigged and fished in exactly the same manner as regular artificial worms and they perform at least as well as the purchased varieties.

Lures

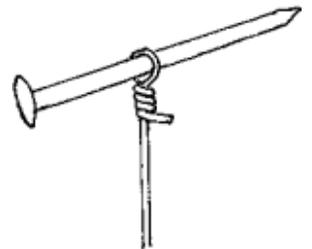
Another home-built lure that I've come to like adds sound as an extra attractant. This lure is easily put together from plumbing fittings and a few buckshot or BBs. You can use either copper or plastic plumbing supplies, depending on the particular size and action you prefer as well as whatever it is you have available.



Skirted treble hook with a slip sinker

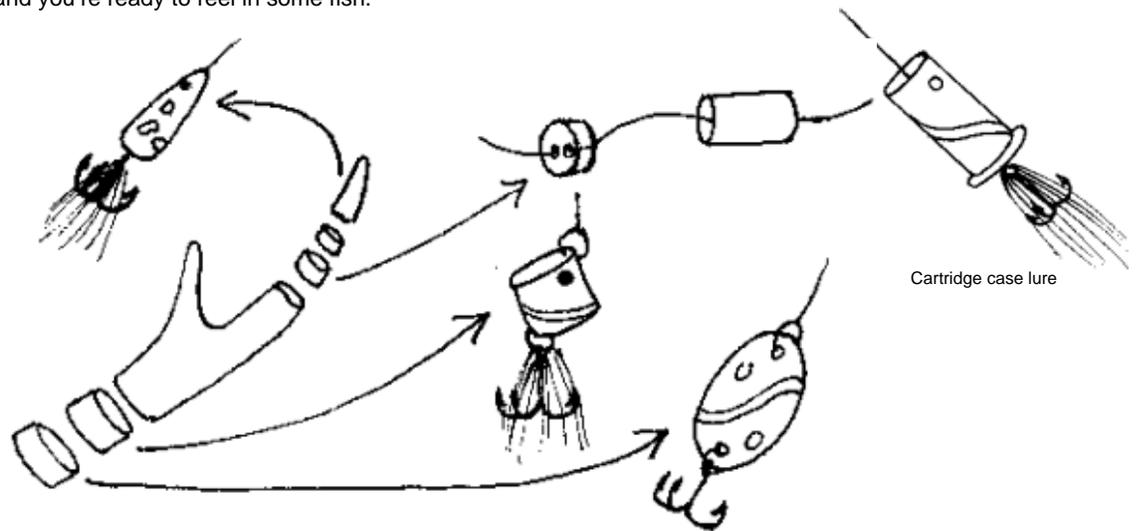
Drill small holes in the centers of a pair of end caps, then glue or solder one cap in place. Run a length of copper or stainless steel wire through the hole and make an eye, as shown in the illustration. Drop in a few BBs or buckshot, run the wire out through the other end cap, and glue or solder the second end cap in place. Fashion another eye in this end of the wire.

Now, attach a treble hook and tie on a "skirt" of horsehair, yarn, feathers, or whatever you prefer. Use paint or left-over nail polish (with a wife and four daughters, there's always plenty of that around here) to add some color



Using a nail to form an "eye" in the end of a wire

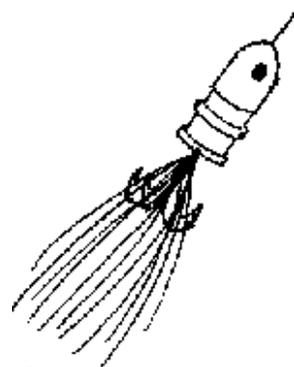
and you're ready to reel in some fish.



Cartridge case lure

You can turn a single deer antler into a collection of nice lures and bobber stops, using the points and sawn slices.

Even more easily fashioned is another home-built lure that I've had plenty of success with. I just tie a skirt of brightly colored yarn onto a treble hook, then affix this to the line right behind a brightly painted slip-style round-ball sinker. A lot of times this will turn out to be my most productive panfish lure.



Bullet sinker with treble hooks and yarn streamers

I also often use a bullet sinker and a long "streamer" of yarn, put together in the same fashion, to bring in largemouth or walleye with similar excellent results.

Eventually, even most empty cartridge cases usually end up being recycled into fishing lures at our house. Centerfire cartridges, that have outlived their reloadable life spans simply have their primers punched out at the loading bench. For spent rimfire cases, I use a hammer and nail to punch holes through the base. Then I paint a couple of bright eye spots onto the case and thread this empty case onto a line ahead of a yarn skirted treble hook. This very quickly produces another lure that catches fish.

With the aid of a drill, hacksaw, and some sandpaper, a whole bunch of really nice lures can be produced from a single deer antler. First, saw off all of the tines (or points). These are drilled through, painted, and have treble hooks attached to produce the torpedo-shaped lures illustrated.



Setting a hook into a cast spoon-mold lure

Now, diagonal slices of varying thickness can be sawn off the remaining antler. These are sanded smooth (maybe even buffed and polished), painted in differing patterns, and drilled as shown. With skirted hooks attached, these are usually very productive lures. Leftover antler pieces, too small to make into lures, can be sawn into thin slices and drilled button fashion to be used as bobber stops.

While you're using your metal measuring spoons to cast sinkers anyway, it's not a bad idea to occasionally insert a hook into the molten metal, as shown, and hold it in place with pliers until the lead solidifies. Paint these spoon-type lures in varying color combinations. I also produce spoon type lures from thrift shop silverware by cutting off the handle and filing the lure smooth.

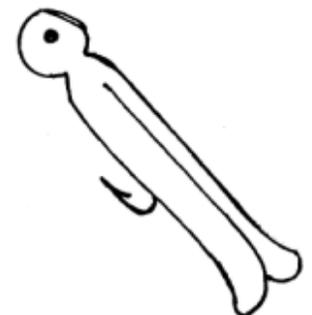


Lure made from a thrift store spoon: cut off the handle and file smooth.

Many top water lures, or plugs, can be simply fashioned out of wood by even a mediocre whittler. Just about every lure I've ever made in this manner has done a good job of catching fish. For your very first attempt, you might want to try turning an ordinary clothespin into a fine floating bass lure, as shown, just to give you a sense of how well this can work.

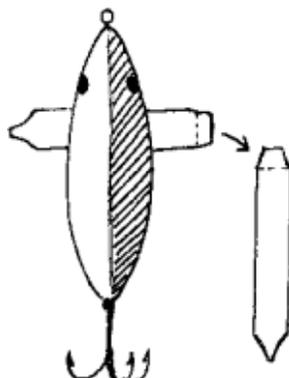
Possibly my very favorite wooden lure, though, is a copy of the ancient Devon Minnow, one of the first successful artificials ever recorded. To fashion this lure, you'll first need to carve one piece of wood into a nice tapered cigar sort of shape, then sand this lure body real nice and smooth.

Now, take a piece of dowel about half the diameter, and two-thirds the length of the lure body. Trim the ends of this dowel so that each end forms a flat section at approximately 90° to each other. Drill an appropriate sized hole crosswise through the body of the lure and glue the dowel in place through this hole. Insert a small screw eye at each end of the lure. Attach a treble hook (with or without a skirt) at one end, with the opposite eye serving to attach your line.



Plug-type top water lure made by setting a large single hook into a wooden clothespin

Paint each side of the lure with a different color, and paint on eye spots. This lure spins much like a rifle bullet as you retrieve it through the water, producing just as many catches today as when it was originated hundreds of years ago.

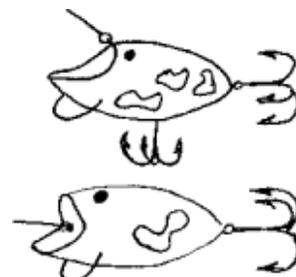


The Devon Minnow lure

A couple of other carved wooden lures are also illustrated to help add a little inspiration as you begin thinking up your own styles and designs for producing these sorts of lures.

I've also learned to keep a sharp eye out at our area thrift stores for cheap costume jewelry. Until you get some experience of your own, you just can't believe how many fine quality "fish catchers" you can produce from a 50¢ "junk" necklace. Sometimes you might need to add a short length of polished copper tube, a spoon blade, or some other extra to the beads and baubles you string on your line. But junk shop jewelry always seems to be even more attractive to fish than it was to its original wearer.

So, good fishing, and enjoy.



Carved wooden lures

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