



# Beginners Guide to Bow Fishing

## WHY BOW FISH?

Historically, bow fishing was used for subsistence. In modern times it has become something of a fun sport, making a solid comeback over the past few years because it's inexpensive, provides some tasty protein, and helps with conservation on our waterways.

For conservation, it started as a way to take out invasive species. If you check the laws in your state you'll find that the only species currently legal to bow fish are invasive and detrimental to the other fish and life around the waterways.

As food, you typically won't find them on a 4-star restaurant menu, but you can slap together quite the satisfying feast (yep, don't turn your nose up at properly prepared catfish). Also think smoked carp which tastes a bit like beef jerky. Or try carp patties with added chopped onion, celery, lemon juice, egg, mayo and your favorite seasonings. Those sucker fish? Oh, yeah... they produce a flaky white meat with a minimum of fishy flavor. How about a nice long-nosed gar? It tastes surprisingly good, especially their deer-like backstraps.

If you don't eat them, you can give them to someone who will, you can use them as fertilizer in your home garden, donate them to feed animals at zoos and game farms (many will pay you per pound), or simply use them for bait.

In a serious crisis situation where food is scarce, that stringer full of fish might just help you fend off starvation.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

If you think bow fishing is an expensive endeavor, guess again. You can easily put together a setup for as little as \$30 if you already have a bow. If you don't have a bow, you can pick one up at second-hand stores, garage sales, pawn shops, or on Craig's List for an extra \$30, because you won't need a fancy rig to bow fish. Nor will you need a large bow with a high draw weight, because you will be bagging fish from a short distance.

What you will need beyond a bow and arrow is a line and reel (even the most basic) as well as some special arrow tips for bow fishing.

### Bow Fishing Reels

You'll want to get something that's fast and simple, such as a basic hand reel with line, on up to something like the AMS Pro Retriever that holds your line in a bottle instead of on a spool.

## Beginners Guide to Bow Fishing *(continued)*

The bottle rigged reel offers great line control with no line kinking and zero drag. They easily mount to your bow, then just draw, aim, shoot and reel 'er in!



*A simple drum spool and line*



*The AMS Pro Retriever*

### Bow Fishing Arrow Tips

Bow fishing arrow tips are specially designed to include all the features you need on the water with lightweight construction, collapsed barbs (to hook the fish firmly), and great penetration. The collapsed barbs offer the smallest entry point possible with great penetration and holding power.



### HOW TO BOWFISH

Obviously the first thing you'll need to scout is a good waterway, preferably with clear water for maximum visibility to see a fish. Before heading out, check your local regulations on bow fishing. You'll need a fishing license, but a small game hunting license may be acceptable in your state / locale. The fish that are legal to take with a bow will vary depending on your area, but will generally be limited to the invasive species. In some areas, you'll even be allowed to bow fish for catfish, redfish, stingray, and tilapia.

Depending on the waterway, your best bet might be working the shoreline, the shallows in a river or inlet, and the like. You can also use a boat, but make sure it's got a low draft and flat bottom so you don't overturn in the excitement of bagging a fish.



## Beginners Guide to Bow Fishing *(continued)*

Once you spot a target, aiming is going to be the biggest challenge due to light refraction on the water. It helps to have a good pair of polarized sunglasses to help more precisely judge the depth. Tip for beginners: aim low. Also, be consistent with the proper form including anchor point, release and follow through.

See **"Beginners Guide to Bow Hunting"**

<https://corac.co/2024/04/18/beginners-guide-to-bow-hunting/>  
for more detailed information on form.

If fishing at night, you'll also need a reliable spotlight and spotter(s). It's the way I learned to bow fish for gar in my young years from the deck of a small pontoon boat. It was a bit of a circus with my younger brothers, but the good times and laughter we shared bagging gars is the stuff of fireside tales that keeps us bonded these decades hence.

