

# Oregon Bass Fishing

Bass are an increasingly popular game fish even in a state noted for its native salmon, steelhead and trout. Bass often thrive in the urban waters of places like the Willamette Valley where warmer temperatures limit trout fishing in the summer months.

**W**hether you target them in the Columbia or Willamette rivers, a coastal lake or the neighborhood pond, throughout much of the year bass can offer a rewarding fishing opportunity relatively close to home.

## License requirements

A general Oregon Angling License is required to fish for bass.

## Where and when to fish

Largemouth bass reach prodigious sizes (up to nine pounds), are relatively solitary and are more tolerant of warm, murky water than smallmouth bass.

"Smallies", on the other hand, are slightly smaller than largemouth bass (Oregon state record is a little under nine pounds), tend to hang out in schools, and prefer cooler, clearer water. Smallmouth bass are more often found in deeper lakes and reservoirs where water temperatures stay cooler, and in moving waters such as the Columbia, Willamette, South Umpqua and John Day rivers.

When it comes to strength, fight and acrobatics, smallmouth bass are considered top tier, behind only steelhead and Atlantic salmon (really!) and although other fish might fight harder, few will put on as good a show as a leaping and diving largemouth bass.

Both largemouth and smallmouth bass are very opportunistic and can do well in a variety of lakes, ponds, reservoirs, rivers and sloughs. The ODFW weekly



Recreation Report (<https://myodfw.com/recreation-report/fishing-report>) includes fishing updates throughout the state.

The best bass fishing occurs during three seasons:

- Prespawn typically begins in April when water temperatures near 60 degrees. Fish tend to school up in shallow waters and feed heavily. This can be the best time of year to catch big bruisers that normally inhabit the deepest waters.

Once spawning ends, bass are not as aggressive and can be more difficult to catch.

- Summer brings warmer water temperatures and the fish move into deeper, cooler waters. As long as water temperatures stay below 80 degrees, bass will remain feisty and receptive to a well-presented lure. While deeper water presentations are most effective during the day, anglers can tempt bass with surface lures during early morning and late evening when the sun is not directly on the water.
- Late summer and early fall can trigger a burst of feeding activity with bass, who sense the coming cold weather. Next to the pre-spawn period, this can be the best fishing of the year. Once a lake turns over and water temperature drops below 50 degrees, bass become lethargic and difficult to catch.

## Techniques and Equipment

Bass fishing techniques tend to be based on the kind of lure you're throwing.

■ **Worms (and other plastics)** – Perhaps the most popular and effective bass lures, rubber worms come in a variety of sizes and colors, and can be fished using a variety of techniques. Bass will often hit a worm as it is dropping through the water. A very, very slow “dragging” retrieve along the bottom can entice inactive or non-receptive fish, while the use of a more animated curly-tailed worm can attract more active fish in warmer waters.

■ **Crankbaits (aka diving plugs)** – These lures got their name because they are designed to cast out and then “crank” back in. Hollow plastic or wood lures designed to dive to varying depths they come in variety of shapes, colors and sizes to imitate bait fish.

■ **Spinnerbaits** – These were once called safety-pin lures because the shape of the wire framework resembles an open safety pin. These lures combine a lead head with one or more flashing spinner blades, a sharp hook and a rubber skirt to hide the hook. These are very versatile lures that can be fished year-round in almost any conditions.

■ **Jigs** – Jigs are heavy, lead-headed lures with a single hook often masked with a rubber skirt, hair or other materials. Designed to ride hook side up, these are good lures to fish around wood and docks throughout the season.

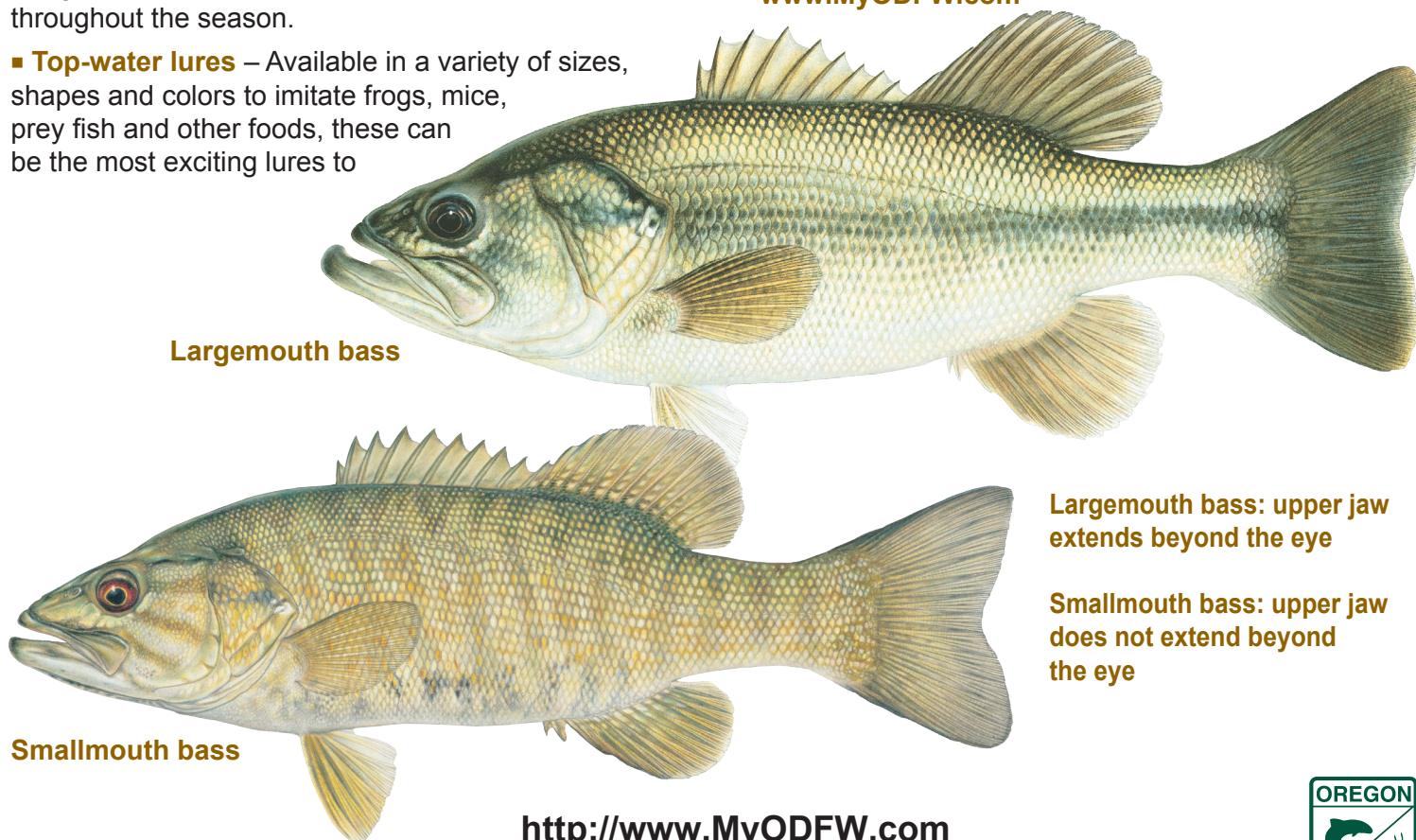
■ **Top-water lures** – Available in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors to imitate frogs, mice, prey fish and other foods, these can be the most exciting lures to

fish because you see the fish come to the surface of the water and take the lure in an aggressive, splashy take. Bass are sun shy, so fish top-water lures early or late in the day when the sun is off the water.

■ **Swimbait**s – These are large (up to 6-8 inches) soft rubber or plastic lures with a jig head that resemble prey fish. Once used mostly during the prespawn, these lures are becoming more popular among anglers targeting trophy bass throughout the year. These lures will not catch large numbers of fish (if you fish them exclusively be prepared for fishless days) but when they work they will catch trophy-size fish.

Like many other kinds of fishing, bass rods and reels can be highly specialized depending on the type and size of the lure you will be casting. For the beginning bass angler, a good all-purpose rod to start with is a 6 to 6 1/2 foot baitcasting or spinning rod, with medium action and rated for an 8 to 12 pound line and 1/4 to 3/4 ounce lure.

For more information about fishing for bass and other warmwater species, check out the Warmwater Fishing in Oregon series published by ODFW. Each of the 10 different brochures covers a different part of the state and lists recommended waters, species available and tips and techniques. Pick up a copy at your local ODFW office, or visit the web site at [www.MyODFW.com](http://www.MyODFW.com)



Largemouth bass

Largemouth bass: upper jaw extends beyond the eye

Smallmouth bass: upper jaw does not extend beyond the eye

Smallmouth bass

<http://www.MyODFW.com>