

BIG FISH, LITTLE FISH: THE MOST COMMON MYTHS, MISCONCEPTIONS, AND OUTRIGHT LIES ABOUT BASS FISHING

Is there any sport in the world better than bass fishing? For diehard fishermen, the answer is a resounding no. There's something about fishing for the big bass that just appeals to someone unlike any other sport. Maybe it's the idea that you don't need to train every day and watch your diet, maybe it's because you're facing an opponent that you can't see and that may not even respond to you. Maybe because, unless you're in a tournament, you can eat your opponent at the end of your competition. Try that after a few rounds on the golf course or after an arm wrestling match!

Fishing has evolved from a lifesaving necessity and means to feed one's family, to a relaxing hobby that was the common pursuit of retirees and those with not much time on their hands and not much attention for faster moving sports, to an out-and-out obsession among fishermen and competitors. Coming home with a bucketful of fish that seems to be bursting at the seams, or with bragging rights over who has the biggest and fattest catch, is not just for those retirees any longer. Entire tournaments with prizes in the tens of thousands of dollars, sometimes even up to a million dollars, are springing up everywhere, and every year there are more and more participants. These tournaments are routinely covered by major television and cable networks, including ESPN, Fox, and ABC Sports.

Of course, tournaments aside, fishing is still one of the most relaxing hobbies there can be if you choose to make it such. While some love the thrill of the hunt and are almost obsessed with getting the biggest and baddest fish there are, some just want to enjoy a beautiful day from the edge of a pier or while slowly trolling along a gorgeous lake. What other sport can you engage in that allows you to go at your own pace, be alone with your thoughts, and gives you the enjoyment of waterfront living?

If you're interested in bass fishing for whatever reason, be it a solitary hobby that gives you some peace and quiet and lets you have your thoughts to yourself, or because you truly appreciate the competition involved when your opponent is hundreds of feet below water and doesn't even know he's in a struggle with you, then we have some important tips and pointers for you. We're here to share with you some of the most common myths, misconceptions, and outright lies there are in the world of bass fishing - other than those stories about the ones that got away, of course!

We've sorted through the hype and the stories that many newbies hear when they first set out, and have found these misconceptions and inaccuracies that we've laid out for you here to be the ones that are most typical, the ones that are spread around the most.

It's important for you to sort through these myths and misconceptions if you're serious about bass fishing. You can waste a lot of time chasing after fish with the wrong bait and equipment, trying the wrong cast, or not realizing what equipment is necessary in the first place. Like trying to play tennis with a racquetball racket, you're just wasting everyone's time when you don't show up with the right equipment, or don't know how to use the equipment you've got.

And not only will sorting through the hype and lies and misconceptions translate into better and bigger catches every day that you're out, but could actually save you literally thousands of dollars over the lifetime of your hobby.

We'll explain what we mean by that with our very first misconception:

MISCONCEPTION #1: YOU NEED A BIG, BAD BOAT TO CATCH THE BIG, BAD FISH.

This thought probably originated because in so many other sports, bigger is better. The more powerful your stock car, the more likely you are to win a race. There is no end to the amount of money you can spend on virtually any type of sporting goods, from tennis rackets to fancy snowboards to new golf clubs.

In those other sports, the latest equipment is designed with all sorts of scientific principles and ideas about what materials work best, what designs speed down the snow covered mountain the fastest, which types of materials work best in one's hands, and so on.

But not so with a bass fishing boat. Bigger is not always better, and neither is faster. There are no points in fishing for outrunning your fish or getting to them faster than anyone else ever has.

As a matter of fact, a boat that's too big might keep you out of the shallow areas of a lake or river where bass may tend to congregate. Bass fishing isn't like fishing for marlins or swordfish out in the ocean - your catch isn't going to always be right out in the open waters like that.

It might also mean a larger and therefore louder engine, which is just going to startle the fish and drive them away. Those big engines mean more noise and more vibration in the water to drive your fish away.

The best bass fishermen in the world will tell you that you can catch fish with the smallest of aluminum rental boats and engines with only a few horsepower. As a matter of fact, the most important aspect of the boat and motor has to do with your **control** over them. Trolling is a big part of catching bass, and you need to be able to control your boat's speed and maneuver it in and around cover that's in the lake or river. And unless your boat comes with a driver, you'll need to do all of this with your pole in the water!

In bass fishing, sometimes smaller is better if it means more control for you, less noise, less disturbance in the water, and less clumsiness overall.

Of course your boat should seat you and all your friends comfortably if your fishing is a group excursion, and you need storage for all your gear as well. But when you go boat shopping, don't let your self get all caught up in those huge speedboats and let the salesman try to tell you that this is what's needed to catch the big fish. It's your skill that's going to get the fish in the boat, not the size of the boat or motor.

MISCONCEPTION #2: YOU NEED THE BIGGEST LURES TO CATCH THE BIGGEST FISH.

Who knows where this misconception came from. Perhaps some who have pets at home reason that because larger dogs need more food, then bigger fish will be attracted to bigger lures.

In truth, fish don't have this much thought as to what they're biting after. Small fish sometimes jump at larger lures, and large fish will feed on whatever is in front of them - small, medium, or large. They not like people, ordering up the

double cheeseburger and purposely skipping over the tiny kid's meal. When a fish sees something it is attracted to for feeding, it will strike if the conditions are right. Rarely does it take into account the size alone.

Larger fish didn't get that way from feeding only on larger food. They may eat smaller frogs and minnows but eat more often. Most fish are like goldfish, wherein they'll just keep growing until they fit their environment. So the larger bass didn't get that way by passing up on the smaller feed, they just keep eating whenever they have the chance.

Remember too that larger lures can be startling to fish if not handled properly. A large frog lure slapping the water is only going to cause the fish to scatter, not attract them. Thinking that you can just toss in a large lure and get the biggest fish to you that way is shortsighted.

When it comes to lures, you have literally thousands of possibilities for you, from small rubber worms to oversized fish. If you're thinking you need to invest in frog after frog for those big fish, don't. Spend that time and effort perfecting your casting skills instead.

MISCONCEPTION #3: YOU SHOULD TRY SEVERAL DIFFERENT TYPES OF CASTS TO GET THE BEST FISH.

There's a reason why professional fishermen use several different types of casts, including overhead, underhand, and sidearm varieties. Being able to control where and how your bait and lure land is very important for your success. You typically want to have your cast land past the area where you want to fish and then slowly retrieve it back. You also want to be able to make your lure look as if it's alive; fish are rarely attracted to dead lures that just sit in the water.

Some different types of casts will enable you to better control where you lure lands and how it will be controlled. It is a good idea to try different varieties and to practice them, even when you're not on the water. These casts will serve you well if you need to get over or around cover, and things in the water such as piers and docks. These will get you to the best fish and the best schools of them, and you can't always use an overhand cast to get to them.

But it's not imperative that you master these different types of casts in order to be successful. Most people are very capable with the overhand cast, usually the first type they learn and have used for years.

If you are comfortable with your overhand cast and can control it adequately, then it will probably be sufficient for you. The key is being able to control it not just as you release it but through the retrieval process as well. If you are having problems with the underhand or sidearm casts, and are doing fine with your overhand cast, then there's no reason to change.

When you're considering a tournament this might be a different story. Getting to the best quality fish is going to be important when you're competing, and tournament players practice their casts all the time - in front of the television, out in the backyard, and so on. Like a pro golfer practices with several different clubs, a pro fisherman needs to practice with several different casts. But for most who are just trying to improve their everyday catch, you can use your overhand cast and do quite fine.

MISCONCEPTION #4: SONAR UNITS ARE POINTLESS UNLESS YOU'RE IN A COMPETITION.

Maybe the reason some people think this is because they assume that sonar units are highly expensive pieces of equipment that you use when searching for the ruins of some luxury liner or sunken treasure. They watch movies like Titanic and see sonar units that need an entire boat all to themselves. What's the point of a unit like this for fishing, right?

It's true that there are sonar units that can run into the thousands of dollars and are used by those looking for elusive treasure. They can be huge units that take up an entire room on a ship and can find the detail of what's on the ocean floor from miles away. Their screens resemble the best and most expensive high definition televisions you'll ever see.

But not all of them are like this. Many sonar units are just a few hundred dollars in cost and smaller than a portable television. They pick up what are schools of fish many hundreds of feet away, ones that you would probably miss on your own.

So why bother with them? Haven't fishermen been doing fine without them for so long now?

How serious are you about finding your fish? How serious of a hobby do you plan on making this? How much time do you want to spend looking for your fish versus catching them?

A good sonar unit can be a good investment in your new hobby, just like some golf lessons for the person who wants to hit the links on a more regular basis. You might want to forego the expense, and certainly this is your choice, but they can be a worthy investment for those who are serious about finding those elusive fish.

Getting a sonar unit is one thing; learning how to best use it is another. Most are very simple contraptions that you simply hook to your boat and flip on. The images on the screen are then interpreted to be fish versus sunken logs and other debris. But they're not that hard to understand and interpret, once you realize what you're doing. Many who have invested in these have reported that they don't know how they ever did without them, and can't stomach the thought of ever doing without them again.

If you're serious about finding the best schools of fish, then you need to be serious about investing in a sonar unit. If you're happy just hunting around and using trial and error in your hunt for where they are, or are happy just casting and relying on luck to bring the fish to you, then this is your choice. But to really make your time on the water count, consider a sonar unit.

MISCONCEPTION #5: ALL BAIT WORKS ALL THE TIME.

Just toss a worm on your line and go fishing, right?

Sure, this method of fishing has worked for thousands of years; even primitive man learned how to use basic bait in his hunt for fish. Since we don't have records of that generation where all men starved to death, it must have been somewhat successful.

But today's fishermen are different. Relying on dumb luck just isn't going to cut it. We want to make sure our time on the water counts for something, and since we know so much more about what the fish are biting on, we should be more inclined to use that knowledge to our advantage.

In reality, you need to understand how fish feed and when so that you can better understand what bait to present to them. Offering your family tacos for breakfast probably isn't going to go over very well, and the same with fish. They feed differently in the morning, in springtime, during the colder months, and so on.

Crankbaits work well early in the day, while you should switch to grubs when fishing later in the day.

Another reason for understanding this difference in what you should present and when is that you want to resemble what is found in nature. Grubs aren't usually found in the morning, and might throw off a fish if presented.

MISCONCEPTION #6: ONCE YOU'VE GOT THE FISH HOOKED, YOUR WORK IS DONE.

You'd be surprised how many of even the best fishermen lose a fish in their netting process. This means that you fight and struggle to get the fish on the line and to the boat, and then lose it because you couldn't make the transfer from the water to the boat.

Good netting skills are imperative for a successful fishing day. It's surprising how tangled up the bass can get in the boat and lines, and how difficult it can be to actually get it in the boat once it approaches.

If your netting skills aren't good, not only might you lose the fish but you might lose your pole or line as well. A fish fighting you around the engine blades can mean a cut line, which means a lost lure as well as a lost fish. And many inexperienced fishermen have been thrown off balance when fighting the big fish and have found their poles slipping right out of their fingers. Good luck getting one of those back!

We have a tendency to fight the fish once we've caught it, trying to force it into the boat. We may think that we can strong-arm it or overpower it.

In reality, finesse and patience are what's needed to net the fish once it's hooked. Trying to overpower it might just rip the hook right out of its mouth or snap your line if it's not weight properly.

Fish can get worn out very quickly, and letting it fight you a little bit may be what's needed to make it get tired. Move your pole in the direction the fish is swimming rather than trying to force it in the other direction. Especially if the fish are working toward the back of the boat; stand up and walk your line around the motor. If necessary, pull the engine out of the water so you know it won't get tangled up.

Turning the fish's mouth is also important but you need to do this gently. Don't yank or jerk the line at all, ever.

And having your net out and available is also important. When you arrange your gear in the morning or when you first get in the boat, make sure the net is not buried under other gear or someplace you can't get to easily. If you have someone else with you then all the better, but when you're fishing on your own you need to learn some netting skills to get the fish in the boat once they're hooked.

MISCONCEPTION #7: FISH ARE FISH.

Even someone that keeps fish as pets will tell you what a misconception this is.

To find your bass and entice them to your lure, you need to understand how they think - that's right, fish actually think.

A fish's habitat will need to provide him everything he needs for survival. That means food and adequate space. If they're not happy in one corner of a lake for whatever reason, they'll move to another. When they're hungry and feed isn't right in front of them, they'll start looking for it.

By understanding what fish are looking for and why, you'll be in a better position to lure them to your line. And what one type of fish is looking for by way of feed and environment is not going to be what another fish is looking for.

Bass tend to congregate where there's cover, as opposed to some fish that prefer open water. You might not like fishing around fallen logs, under seaweed, or in corners of bays and inlets, but this is where the fish are going to be. You may not want to invest in some fancy lures that resemble frogs and minnows and grubs and may not want to learn how to cast them properly, but this is what you need to get the fish to your line.

Any successful hunter will study their prey to understand where it will be and what will get it out. Bass fishing is no different. You can't treat them the same as you would any other type of fish and just assume they'll come to you. Understand what they need and what they're looking for, and you'll do much better.

MISCONCEPTION #8: YOU CAN FIND BASS ANYWHERE.

That would be nice, wouldn't it? Your local lake or river or stream bed containing some fat bass.

In reality, you need to go where the bass are to find the biggest and the best. This doesn't mean just any lake or river, or any location in that lake or river.

To that end, we've compiled a list of places you may want to consider as a destination vacation the next time you're out to catch the best:

Glen Elder Reservoir, Kansas

Because this is public water, Glen Elder is a favorite haunt for bass fishermen everywhere. Not only do they have some of the best bass around, the waters are also full of walleyes, crappies, bluegills, and catfish. The natural streams that feed below the reservoir keep the water fresh and the fish naturally stocked. It is a beautiful area with some of the best fishing around.

Lake El Salto, Mexico

Fishing excursions in Mexico are nothing new, but luxury yachts that offer bass fishing charters are catching on in Mexico for a reason. They're understanding how many fishermen aren't looking for the big marlins or other exotic game fish, but are after the elusive bass. And Lake el Salto in Mexico has some of the best bass fishing around. Catching ones that are over ten pounds is not unusual.

Kissimmee Chain of Lakes, Florida

Florida is known for its great fishing and always has been. The weather is incredible and it's a great destination for those who want to keep their U.S. dollars in the U.S.

The Kissimmee Chain of Lakes is known for catering to tourists looking for bass excursions. They have all sorts of resorts and packages and boats for hire, along with guides that know the lakes and channels in between. If you're looking for a Florida vacation that will let you bring in the big fish, this is the place to go.

Blue Ridge Parkway Lakes, North Carolina

The Blue Ridge Parkway is one of the most scenic drives in all of North America, and nestled in the Great Smokey Mountains are some of the best bass fishing lakes you'll ever find.

What makes a vacation destination in this area so appealing to many is that it can be very affordable. No need to charter a big boat or stay in a fancy hotel while

you're here. Most tourists in this area camp along the Parkway and can either bring their own small boat or rent one along the way. If you want to catch the best bass but are on a budget, this is the place to go.

Lake Folsom, California

Near Sacramento, this lake offers beautiful weather, beautiful sites, and beautiful bass. Anyone wanting to enjoy a great time out in the sun while hunting down their bass should definitely check this one out.