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## Ultimate Guide to Legal Live Fishing Baits in Wisconsin

Fishing in Wisconsin offers a diverse range of opportunities, and selecting the right live bait is essential for success. Popular options include minnows like fathead minnows and golden shiners, which are ideal for catching walleye, bass, and northern pike using rigs, bobbers, or trolling techniques. Worms, such as nightcrawlers and earthworms, are a staple for anglers targeting bluegill, perch, and catfish with bottom or drift fishing methods. Leeches, with their natural movement, are especially effective for walleye and northern pike in warm waters. Insects like grasshoppers and crickets appeal to trout and panfish, while larvae such as waxworms, mealworms, and spikes are popular for ice fishing or targeting crappie and bluegill. Native frogs also make excellent bait for largemouth bass and catfish when used in weedy areas.

## Angler's Handbook: Legal Live Baits for Wisconsin Waters



Catch More Fish: [Legal Live Bait Tips for Wisconsin Anglers](#)

**Minnow Types:**

**1. Fathead Minnows**

- **Description:** Fathead minnows are small, hardy fish with an olive or greyish color and a blunt head. They are highly resilient and can survive in a variety of water conditions, making them a favorite for anglers.
- **Common Size:** 1 to 3 inches.
- **Ideal Use:** Best for catching [walleye](#), crappie, and perch. They are often used in rigs or under bobbers for their natural movement.
- **Bonus Fact:** These minnows are widely available and cost-effective, making them an accessible choice for anglers.

**2. Golden Shiners**

- **Description:** Known for their metallic golden sheen, these minnows are sleek and shiny, which makes them visually attractive to predator fish.
- **Common Size:** 2 to 6 inches.
- **Ideal Use:** Excellent for catching larger game fish such as bass, northern pike, and musky. They are often used for free-line fishing or in trolling setups.
- **Bonus Fact:** Golden shiners can be more delicate than other minnows, requiring careful handling to keep them lively.

**3. Creek Chubs**

- **Description:** Creek chubs are robust, torpedo-shaped minnows with dark brown or greenish backs and lighter underbellies. They are naturally found in streams and creeks, which adds to their appeal for fish.

- **Common Size:** 3 to 6 inches.
- **Ideal Use:** Best for catching large predator fish like pike, bass, and catfish. They are often hooked through the back or lips and used for bottom or drift fishing.
- **Bonus Fact:** Their durability makes them a favorite for anglers targeting aggressive, trophy-sized fish.

#### 4. Suckers

- **Description:** Suckers are larger, cylindrical minnows with thick, fleshy lips designed for bottom feeding. They come in various shades, often brown or silver.
- **Common Size:** 4 to 10 inches.
- **Ideal Use:** Perfect for targeting musky, northern pike, and large catfish. They are often used in live bait rigs or as cut bait for bottom feeders.
- **Bonus Fact:** Because of their size and strength, suckers are excellent for attracting and handling large, aggressive fish species.

Each type of minnow has unique characteristics that make it suited for specific fishing scenarios, ensuring anglers have options for any target fish or water condition.

## Worm Types for Live Fishing Baits

### Worm Types:

#### 1. Nightcrawlers

- **Description:** Nightcrawlers are large, segmented worms with a smooth, slimy texture. They are typically light pink to brown and can grow up to 8 inches in length. Known for their durability and wriggling motion, they are a classic choice for fishing.
- **Ideal Use:** Nightcrawlers are highly versatile and can be used for bottom fishing, drift rigs, or worm harness setups. Their size makes them suitable for targeting larger fish.
- **Main Fish:** Walleye, bass, catfish, and trout.
- **Bonus Fact:** Nightcrawlers are often sold in bait shops and are easy to keep fresh when stored in a cool, damp environment.

#### 2. Earthworms

- **Description:** Earthworms are smaller than nightcrawlers, with a thinner body and lighter pinkish-brown color. They are often naturally found in garden soils and are highly effective bait for a variety of fish.
- **Ideal Use:** Best suited for smaller hooks and lighter tackle, earthworms are typically used under bobbers or on simple hooks.
- **Main Fish:** Bluegill, perch, crappie, and panfish.
- **Bonus Fact:** Their small size and energetic movement make earthworms especially appealing to smaller fish species.

#### 3. Redworms

- **Description:** Redworms, also known as red wigglers, are small, reddish worms that are lively and durable. They are slightly thicker than earthworms but smaller than nightcrawlers, making them a great all-around bait option.

- **Ideal Use:** Redworms are versatile and work well for both small and medium-sized fish. They can be fished on small hooks under bobbers or used with lightweight rigs.
- **Main Fish:** Panfish, perch, trout, and small bass.
- **Bonus Fact:** Redworms are often raised in compost bins and are easy to maintain, making them a sustainable and convenient bait choice.

Each worm type has unique characteristics suited to specific fishing scenarios. Nightcrawlers excel in versatility and durability for larger fish, earthworms are ideal for smaller species and light tackle, and redworms provide a balanced option that works well for a variety of fish sizes and types.

## Types of Leeches Used as Live Fishing Baits

### Leeches:

#### 1. Ribbon Leeches

- **Description:** Ribbon leeches are slender, elongated leeches with smooth, soft bodies that move gracefully in the water. They have a dark, almost black coloration, which helps them blend naturally into aquatic environments.
- **Ideal Use:** Ribbon leeches are best used in warm water and are especially effective for slow presentations with slip bobbers or live bait rigs. Their natural undulating movement mimics prey, making them irresistible to fish.
- **Main Fish:** Walleye, smallmouth bass, perch, and northern pike.
- **Bonus Fact:** Ribbon leeches are hardy and stay lively for extended periods, even in challenging conditions.

#### 2. Bait Leeches

- **Description:** Bait leeches are slightly shorter and stockier than ribbon leeches, with a more rounded body. They are often dark brown or black and are easier to handle due to their less active nature.
- **Ideal Use:** These leeches are versatile and work well for a variety of fishing styles, including under bobbers, jigging, or drifting. Their size and action make them an excellent choice for smaller game fish.
- **Main Fish:** Walleye, crappie, perch, and panfish.
- **Bonus Fact:** Bait leeches are commonly available in bait shops and are easier to store and maintain than other leech types.

Both ribbon and bait leeches are excellent live bait options for freshwater fishing. Ribbon leeches are particularly effective for targeting larger predator fish with their natural movement, while bait leeches are a great choice for versatility and ease of use.

## Types of Insects Used as Live Fishing Baits

### Insects:

#### 1. Grasshoppers

- **Description:** Grasshoppers are terrestrial insects with long hind legs and a

green or brown body, making them ideal for mimicking natural prey found near shorelines. Their active movements on the surface attract fish feeding near the top of the water column.

- **Ideal Use:** Best fished on small hooks and light tackle, grasshoppers can be floated on the water's surface near vegetation or shorelines. Their natural buoyancy makes them excellent for topwater fishing.
- **Main Fish:** Trout, bluegill, and other panfish.
- **Bonus Fact:** Grasshoppers are especially effective during the summer months when they are naturally abundant near the water.

## 2. Crickets

- **Description:** Crickets are small, black or dark brown insects that produce vibrations and sound, which can trigger predatory instincts in fish. They are lightweight and easy to use, making them a favorite for anglers targeting smaller fish.
- **Ideal Use:** Fished under a bobber or on a small hook, crickets are effective near weedy areas, submerged vegetation, or along the edges of ponds and streams.
- **Main Fish:** Bluegill, sunfish, crappie, and trout.
- **Bonus Fact:** Crickets are readily available at bait shops and are a reliable choice for beginners and experienced anglers alike.

## 3. Waxworms

- **Description:** Waxworms are the soft, cream-colored larvae of wax moths. They are small, plump, and naturally rich in scent, making them highly enticing to fish. Their soft body makes them easy for fish to bite into, increasing the chances of a successful catch.
- **Ideal Use:** Waxworms are versatile and can be used year-round, especially during ice fishing or for smaller fish in open water. They work well when tipped on small hooks or jigs.
- **Main Fish:** Bluegill, perch, crappie, and trout.
- **Bonus Fact:** Waxworms are ideal for ice fishing because they remain active and lively in cold temperatures, attracting sluggish fish during the winter.

Each type of insect bait offers unique advantages, with grasshoppers and crickets excelling in warm seasons for topwater and near-surface fishing, while waxworms are a versatile year-round option for attracting smaller fish species.

## Types of Grubs Used as Live Fishing Baits

### Grubs:

#### 1. Mealworms

- **Description:** Mealworms are the larval stage of darkling beetles, featuring a cylindrical, segmented body with a golden-brown color. They are tough, durable, and rich in natural scent, making them highly attractive to a variety of fish.
- **Ideal Use:** Mealworms are best fished on small hooks, either under a bobber or tipped onto a jig. They are particularly effective in calm waters and can also be used for ice fishing.
- **Main Fish:** Bluegill, crappie, perch, and trout.

- **Bonus Fact:** Mealworms are easy to store and maintain, requiring only a cool, dry environment to stay fresh and lively.

## 2. Spikes

- **Description:** Spikes, also known as fly maggots, are small, soft-bodied larvae that are typically creamy white in color. They exude a subtle scent and provide a natural texture that fish find irresistible.
- **Ideal Use:** Spikes are commonly used on tiny hooks or tipped onto small jigs, particularly during ice fishing when fish are less aggressive. They are also effective in still water for targeting smaller fish.
- **Main Fish:** Perch, crappie, bluegill, and other panfish.
- **Bonus Fact:** Spikes are a favorite for winter anglers due to their resilience in cold weather and ability to remain lively, even in icy conditions.

Both mealworms and spikes are excellent grub options for fishing. Mealworms excel in versatility and durability for various conditions, while spikes are especially effective in cold-weather fishing scenarios, making them ideal for ice anglers targeting smaller, less aggressive fish.

## Types of Frogs Used as Live Fishing Baits

### Common Native Frogs (Legal for Use as Live Bait if Collected Legally):

#### 1. Northern Leopard Frog

- **Description:** A medium-sized frog with a green or brown body and distinctive dark spots resembling a leopard's pattern. These frogs are abundant in Wisconsin's wetlands and grassy areas.
- **Ideal Use:** Often hooked through the thigh or lips and used for fishing near vegetation or lily pads. Their jumping motion in the water is highly effective for attracting predatory fish.
- **Main Fish:** Largemouth bass, northern pike, catfish.

#### 2. Green Frog

- **Description:** Slightly smaller than the northern leopard frog, green frogs have a green to brown body with a distinct ridged back and smooth skin. They are commonly found in ponds, lakes, and marshes.
- **Ideal Use:** Green frogs are durable and work well for targeting fish in shallow, weedy areas or near docks.
- **Main Fish:** Bass, pike, and musky.

#### 3. Bullfrog

- **Description:** The largest frog species in Wisconsin, bullfrogs have a green or brown body with a large, round head and powerful legs. Their loud croak is a defining feature.
- **Ideal Use:** Bullfrogs are often used as bait for catching large predatory fish due to their size and strength in the water.
- **Main Fish:** Musky, largemouth bass, northern pike.

## Important Notes:

- **Purchased Bait:** Bait must be obtained from a licensed bait dealer to prevent the spread of invasive species and diseases.
- **Transport of Bait:** Transporting bait across state lines or from certain water bodies is often restricted to prevent the spread of invasive species.
- **Drainage:** Water from live bait containers must be drained before leaving the waterbody.
- **Endangered Species:** Using protected or endangered species as bait is prohibited.
- **Local Rules:** Some waters may have specific restrictions on the type of bait that can be used.

Always check the **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR)** for the most current regulations specific to the area or waterbody where you plan to fish.

## Additional Notes:

- Always obtain bait from licensed dealers to prevent invasive species.
- Do not release unused bait into the water.
- Check with the **Wisconsin DNR** for specific regulations on bait transport and collection in your area.

## Conclusion:

Using the right live bait in Wisconsin can significantly enhance your fishing experience, as each type caters to specific fish species and fishing styles. Whether it's the lifelike movement of minnows, the versatility of worms, or the seasonal use of waxworms and spikes for ice fishing, each bait offers unique advantages. Always ensure your bait is obtained legally from licensed dealers to prevent invasive species and follow Wisconsin DNR guidelines to protect aquatic ecosystems. With the proper bait and technique, anglers can enjoy a productive and responsible fishing adventure across Wisconsin's diverse waters.

## Type of Wisconsin Live Bait