Common Tackle for Catching Fish Under Ice.

Ice Fishing Gear

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When lakes and ponds freeze well enough to support foot traffic (a minimum of 3 inches of solid, clear ice is recommended for safe walking), ice fisherman head outdoors for what can be the most productive fishing all year. Ice fishermen use a different strategy compared with open-water anglers: Instead of large, clunky lures and baits used during warm weather, ice fishermen always choose small tackle—very small. Use tiny lures known as jigs—many of them less than ½ inch long—to entice a bite from hungry panfish such as bluegill, crappie and perch. Add a little live bait, such as a wax worm, and dangle the baited jig just above weed beds in water as shallow as 3 feet deep. Very light, thin line (2-4lb. test is best) will pass easily through the tiny hook eye, yet is strong enough to handle any panfish. Miniature fishing rods are preferred for better control while fishing over the open hole. Anglers searching for big predators such as northern pike or walleye often use a device known as a tip-up, which has a spool of line attached to a frame structure that spans the hole in the ice and can be baited with large minnows. When a big fish grabs the bait and pulls the line, a colorful flag springs up to indicate a bite. Freshly caught fish kept on ice are considered the best-tasting fish you'll ever eat!

1. Carrying odd-sized equipment while wearing heavy clothing can be awkward. A sled for hauling gear across the ice improves the experience. 2. An ice auger (fancy models have gas engines) drills perfect holes. Some anglers take the mystery out of the underworld by bringing along portable electronic fish-finders. 3. Note the size difference between tiny ice-fishing jigs (preferred) and a typical warm-water rubber tube jig. 4. A tip-up device, typically used for large game fish such as pike or walleye, features a baited hook with strong line on a spool. When a fish pulls the bait, the flag pops up to indicate a strike.