

# How to Prepare a Boat for Fishing

Fishing from a boat provides certain advantages to fishing from shore, notably the ability to reach more fishing places during a fishing outing than the section of the lake or stream adjacent to a single shore. However, buying a fishing...

Method 1 of 2:

## Preparing For First-Time Use

1.



**License your boat.** Most jurisdictions require boats of at least a certain length to be licensed in order to be used on their waters. Licensed boats typically display a sticker identifying the licensing jurisdiction, followed by a series of letters and numbers. In the United States, most states have reciprocal arrangements where a boat licensed in one state may be used in the waters of another state by a visiting boater.

1. Some states stipulate the appearance of the letter and number stickers that may be used, such as yellow characters on a black background. Check the regulations for your jurisdiction.
2. If you transport your boat on a trailer, your trailer will need to be licensed as well. While your boat is usually licensed through a state's game and fish commission or department of natural resources, the trailer is typically licensed through the state's department of motor vehicles.

2.



**Purchase all necessary safety equipment.** To operate a fishing boat, or any other kind of boat, on the water requires having certain pieces of safety equipment on board. Some of it is required by law; other items are just a good idea to have with you. A partial list of items to enhance your safety is given below.

1. Life jackets/personal flotation devices. Most jurisdictions require a life jacket or other PFD for each passenger aboard and for children below a certain age to be wearing theirs. It's a good idea to wear your life jacket at all times on the water even if the law doesn't require it, which means selecting a comfortable life jacket you will want to wear. (You'll want a life jacket slightly larger than your jacket size so that you can wear it over a jacket; you can adjust it to fit more snugly when not wearing it over a jacket.)
2. Kill switch. If your boat has an outboard or inboard-outboard motor, a kill switch clipped to your belt and to the engine will shut it off if you're thrown from the boat. Many jurisdictions require a kill switch for boats with motors above a certain horsepower.
3. Fire extinguisher. Having a fire extinguisher near the motor will help to quickly put out an engine fire if it occurs. Check the laws for your jurisdiction as to whether an extinguisher is required and what type.
4. Rope. You'll need rope to tie your boat to the dock as well as for your anchor. You should also have a tow rope in case you get stranded in the middle of the lake or to help someone who does.
5. Signaling devices. Such things as an air horn, whistle, flags, or flares can alert others to your predicament when in distress or sound a warning in foggy conditions. Check the laws for your jurisdiction as to what devices are required.
6. Weather radio. This can alert you to upcoming changes in the weather before you note the changes in the sky, wind, and water choppiness.
7. You may also want to buy a cell phone if you don't already have one, as you can use it to call for help while out on the water.
8. If you plan to fish from your boat at night, you'll need to have night-time running lights, which typically include red and green lights for the bow and a white light for the stern. Check with your jurisdiction as to the type of lights required for your size of boat.

3.



**Get an anchor and supporting equipment.** You'll need to have an anchor for those times when you want to keep your boat in the same place when fishing, and you'll also need equipment to support it.

1. The 3 main anchor types used for fishing are the plow-style and Danforth anchors, which feature blades or flukes that dig into the bottom, and the mushroom anchor, named for its shape, which holds primarily due to its weight. A good rule of thumb is to have 1 pound (2.2 kg) of anchor weight for every foot of boat length. You may have multiple anchors, with your bow anchor serving as the primary anchor and the heaviest anchor of the group.
2. You'll want to have enough nylon anchor rope to have from 5 to 7 times the distance from the anchor cleat to the bottom. As this can be a lot of rope, a windlass to keep the rope on will keep it from fouling around your feet when not paid out. You'll also need a cleat or housing for the anchor to rest on when not in the water.
3. Instead of tying the anchor line directly to your anchor, use a length of galvanized chain of 3 to 6 feet (0.9 to 1.8 m) to take the wear and tear caused by dragging the anchor over the bottom before it catches.

4.



**Carry items to cope with weather conditions.** The weather can change suddenly while you're out on the water. It helps to be prepared; the following items can help:

1. Polarized sunglasses can protect your eyes from glare on the water and help you see under the surface to avoid submerged stumps, brush, and rocks.
2. Sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or better, in conjunction with wearing long pants and long sleeves, will help protect you from sunburn.
3. Foul weather gear, such as a waterproof rain parka, will help keep you drier if it rains suddenly while you're out on the lake.



**Consider other items to help you organize your gear.** Rod holders and tie-downs for other items, such as landing nets, will keep those items from shifting around as the boat moves, keeping you from losing them in a sudden turn or from accidental injury from a rod tip or fish hook.

Method 2 of 2:

## Preparing For Fishing Season



**Renew your boat and trailer licenses.** These usually have to be renewed each year.

2.



**Inspect the boat for signs of wear.** Clean the inside and outside hull of any barnacles or debris, and look for dents or cracks in it, particularly on the bottom and around rivets. Also inspect the drain plug to make sure it still seals the drain hole properly and that any onboard lights and electronics work correctly.

3.



**Inspect your motor.** Test the engine to make sure it runs and there are no fluid leaks, replace any necessary parts, and in the case of inboard or larger outboard motors with 4-cycle engines, change the oil. Also, clean the propeller of any debris and make sure it turns freely. Inspect the crank battery for your main motor and the deep-cycle battery for your trolling motor for leaks and to make sure they hold a charge.

4.



**Inspect the boat trailer.** Make sure the wheels and tires are in good shape, along with the winch and pads. Be sure the trailer taillights work as well.

5.



**Inspect and replace any necessary safety equipment.** Check all life jackets for any tears and your children's to see that they still fit. Check the batteries in your weather radio and that your fire extinguishers are properly filled and in working order.

6.



**Consider a professional inspection.** If you don't have the time to inspect your boat yourself, or if you notice something you're not sure is a problem, you can have your boat inspected by a mechanic or outdoor retailer equipped to do inspections. Boats used for saltwater fishing can be inspected by marine surveyors accredited by either the National Association of Marine Surveyors or the Society of Accredited Marine Surveyors.

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