

# EARN YOUR **STRIPES**

Jon Arthur lifts the lid on his  
top perch-tempting tips!



*The author  
with an angry  
canal perch.*

**P**erch are a fantastic species to target right now. It's an ideal time of year as they begin to pack on weight in readiness for spawning. As spring approaches, everything is waking up and that includes these power-packed predators!

I cannot think of a venue that doesn't hold a population of perch. The smaller 'wasps' can sometimes be a nuisance on commercial fisheries, but on natural waters I think everything's welcome. I class a 1lb perch as a big one and anything over 2lb is a specimen. A 3lb perch is a very special fish indeed!

Regardless of their size I think they're a cracking species to target and they always put up a good scrap. A bonus perch has helped me win many a prize. They've also saved me a few dry nets over the years! Here's some top tips to put a few more perch in your nets.





## Perch Baits

The age-old bait that will never be beaten for reliability is the worm. I use both lobworms and dendrabaenas the most. Lobs are great for sorting out bigger specimens as they are larger and wriggle less, plus I'm sure the juices and aminos from a lobworm are more appealing than a dendrabaena. However, I'm still a huge fan of dendras as they're the perfect all-round size for chopping and hooking, plus they are more active which is great for smaller perch in particular.

You also catch more silverfish on dendras than lobs, which can be useful, especially if bream or chub are about. So, if I could only choose one worm it would be a dendra, purely because of their versatility.

After worms, casters are next on the menu. I've had countless big perch on casters over the years. Double caster is particularly deadly. Some people believe lighter casters are best for perch, but I still seem to catch with darker shells.

Maggots are a third option, but aren't as selective, so you attract more smaller fish on them. If getting bites is an issue then definitely have maggots on your sidetray.

Perch in commercial fisheries thrive on neglect, because so many anglers just feed baits like pellets or sweetcorn, which perch rarely eat. Maggots, casters and worms are definitely what I'd use – but don't ignore prawns if you're bold enough to give them a try!

## Where To Fish?

The fact that perch are camouflaged gives away the fact that they love hiding around cover. Bushes, boats, reed beds, tree roots and bridges are all reliable places. However, don't ignore deep channels and shelves, either, as there are plenty of hidden lairs in the deeps.

Often no more than five or six metres from the bank is all you need to fish unless there is an obvious feature further out. The margins are also worth investigating throughout the year, so long as there's a couple of feet or more of depth.

On rivers, fishing just past marginal weed is always reliable; or even a hole in the weed if the flow isn't too strong.

Sometimes even your keepnet can be a perch-attracting feature. It's not uncommon to spot big perch loitering around your net on a clear river. Commercials are also prime venues for perch and reeds or adjacent platforms are always good areas to try.

By far my favourite venues for a bit of perch fishing have to be canals. These long, narrow waterways offer the perfect habitat. You're rarely far away from a perch on a canal – and some surprisingly big ones if you're lucky.

## Feeding Theories

Feeding small dollops of chopped worm and casters at intervals with a cupping kit is my preferred way to keep a perch swim topped up. A few casters peppered over the top adds a fish-attracting rattle to hopefully keep the fish occupied.

I'll also feed smaller amounts via a Flexi Toss Pot if I feel I need to top up more regularly. I generally find topping up frequently is best for small perch, while feeding larger amounts less regularly is better if bigger perch are the main target.

Try dropping the feed in from a height to increase the noise factor. Hungry perch will always rush in to investigate a potential free meal.



## Chop Chop

Scissors have to be on the sidetray when perch are the target. I tape two kitchen utility scissors together to make the ultimate worm chopper. I find these are much more efficient than the bespoke triple-bladed scissors you might see.

Feeding chopped worm has to be the ultimate perch attractor, but don't ignore chopping a few maggots or casters with your worms as well. All these juices help to draw in hungry perch. Fresh juices are always best, so don't chop all your worms up at the start of the session; just do it in batches or just before feeding.

## Drop It

A baitdropper is a valuable asset. River anglers are probably already familiar with these handy gadgets, but don't ignore using them on canals or stillwaters. A baitdropper bombs your feed straight down to the bottom before opening the trap door and releasing its contents. This makes it especially useful when a venue is towing or flowing, if the venue's deep, if you want to avoid small fish in the upper layers intercepting the bait or whenever you want pinpoint accuracy.

I carry several sizes of baitdropper depending on the amounts I want to feed. I've only been using the tiniest versions for a couple of seasons, but they're particularly good on canals and for regularly topping anywhere without spooking the fish too much.





## Large Portions

I like to mix up my worm sizes, so some will be minced finely. I'll then pop a few more worms into the pot and snip them just once or twice. Perch are extremely greedy and even a small perch will quickly gobble up big bits of worm, so it's important to leave some smaller segments in the swim to keep them grubbing about.

With a habit of gorging on bait and quick filling up I think it's best to feed modest amounts of bait at intervals rather than dumping in huge potfuls at the start. Perch also respond really well to noise and movement, so every time you feed it's a column of bait to excite their predatory instincts.

I usually start big when it comes to hook baits, so half a lobworm or two thirds of a dendra will be my starting ploy. If bites are harder to come by it's time to try smaller segments. I usually only pop one or two casters or maggots on the hook once the fish stop taking worm so eagerly. On rock-hard days it's still worth sitting on a bigger bait, however, as I think some fish weigh up the effort versus the reward and can still be tempted by a big worm when they see it.



## Fantastic Elastic

You can often tell immediately when you've hooked a perch as they give you such a characteristic, dogged fight. Perch tend to stay deep down and stubbornly refuse to come up to the surface. They are also notorious for finding snags, so beefed-up elastic is often best to keep them away from sunken branches, roots, carrier bags and basically anything they can swim into!

I use the brilliant Matrix Slik and always go at least a grade heavier for perch than silverfish. I've been experimenting with Short Kits on recent perch sessions with great success as it seems to be the optimum amount of elastic for narrow and snaggy venues such as canals.

For small perch the orange 6-8 is fine, but green 8-10 is a better all-round choice. If I'm after bigger perch with beefier rigs and hook baits I'll use the red 10-12. The orange 12-14 size would be my main choice on deep river swims and with big floats; especially if species like barbel, tench or eels are possible.



## Not Just Perch

Of course, it's very difficult to target perch on their own, so you'll often snare a few nice surprises while fishing for them. It could be a bonus carp, tench, bream, chub or eel. I've also caught numerous pike and zander on my chopped worm rigs on canals and rivers.

I think that's why I enjoy targeting them with positive chopped worm and caster tactics. You have a fighting chance whatever you might hook and when you wallop the hook home you never quite know what will be on the end!



## Hooking Power

Whatever elastic you use, strike positively to help set the hook in a perch's notoriously boney mouth. Everyone loses the occasional perch as their mouths are so hard, but a relatively fine, sharp and strong hook will maximise the chances of a positive hook hold. Avoid hooks that are too fine or springy. I prefer PTFE coated hooks on commercials and black nickel versions on natural venues as I find they stay sharper.

I've actually been using the Matrix SP Feeder Rigs on some of my canal trips lately and cannot fault them. These are 1m long straight off the spool, so I chop them down to the required length, which is normally around 8in or 20cm. The size 12 is my choice for medium to large hook baits like worm. Yes, it's a big hook, but you're using a big hook bait and it marries up nicely. For casters and double maggot I would ideally use a size 16 hook instead. I find you pull out of too many fish if you go much smaller.



## Buoyant Tips

Being able to read the bite is important with perch. They'll often play with the hook bait before engulfing it so leaving a bit of float tip on show allows you to see all the plucks and taps before the float completely buries. With big hook baits in particular I will often count to two or three before finally walloping the hook home. Even with casters and maggots it can pay to delay the strike a fraction to ensure you properly set the hook.

With worms I like carp-style floats with a thick 1.5mm to 2mm hollow bristle and shotted with 5mm to 10mm on show. I generally fish anything from two inches to six inches overdepth depending on the conditions. You don't want the float to be accidentally dragging under all of the time, especially when using larger hook baits.



## Bonus Beauties!

Even if your main target is another species or tactic, it's still worth feeding a throwaway swim for a bonus perch or two. This would typically be close in or somewhere that doesn't interfere with silverfish swims.

Perch are early feeders so starting for perch can be a great opening gambit. It can also be a useful area to try occasionally, so keep it topped up and drop on it whenever you need a break. A five-minute look will allow other swims to rest and could easily reward you with a weight-boosting specimen! ■