WISCONSIN

YELLOW PERCH GUIDE

Find them, catch them, fill the cooler

Your guide to catching perch all year long in Wisconsin.

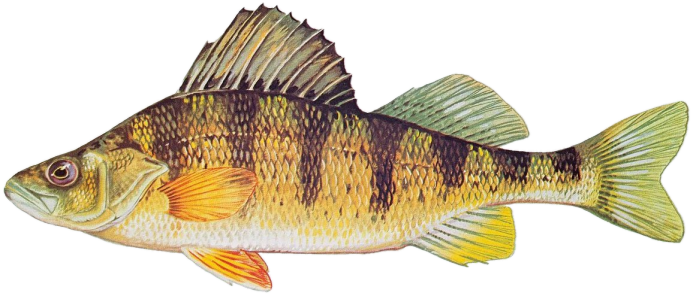


WISCONSIN

YELLOW PERCH

Guide

Find them, catch them, fill the cooler



Wisconsin Yellow Perch Guide
First edition, October 2026

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Read this first. Fishing rules change every year and differ by lake. Everything about seasons, sizes and bag limits in this book is for the 2026–27 season, checked 2026-10-08. Always check the current Wisconsin DNR rules and your lake's own rules before you fish. Depth maps are not for navigation. Ice is never guaranteed safe. You are responsible for your own safety and for following the law.

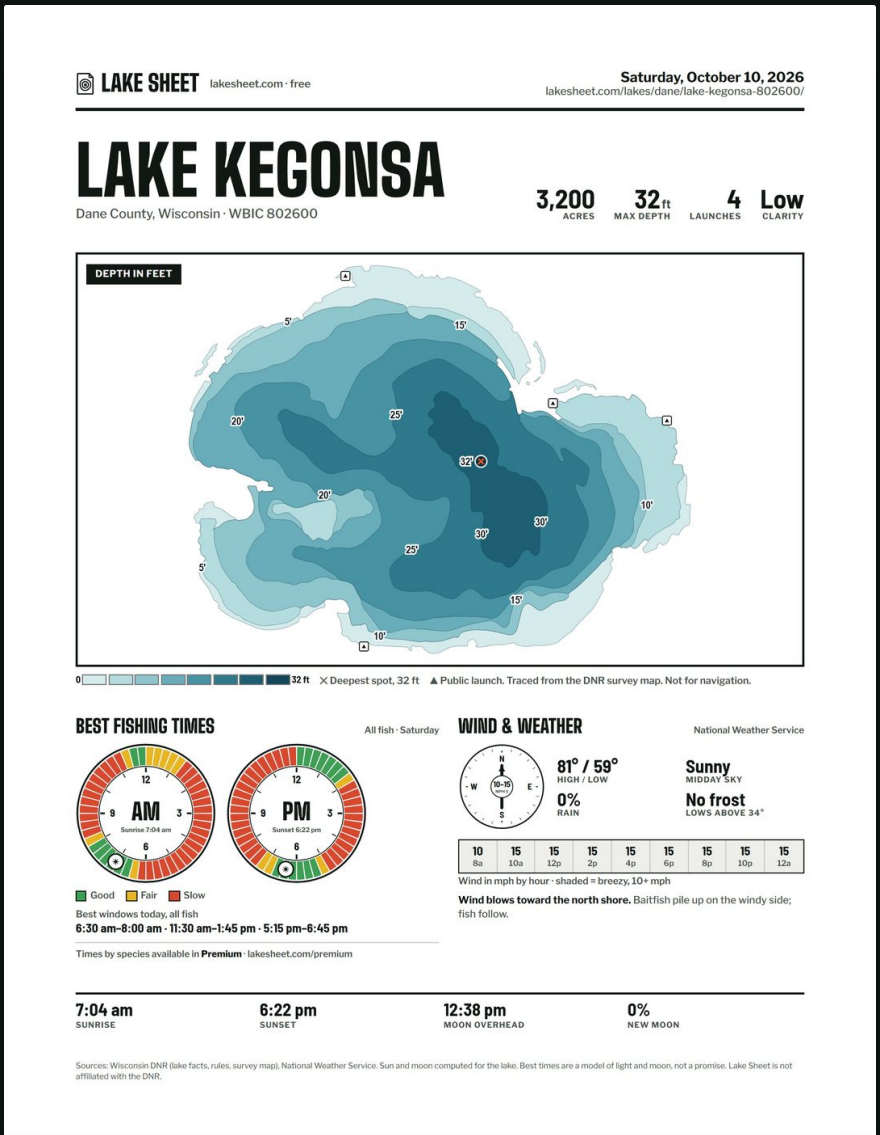
Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lake facts come from DNR survey and stocking records as published by Lake Sheet; see the sources at the back of the book.

lakesheet.com

FREE WITH THIS BOOK

YOUR FREE LAKE SHEET

Free for more than 4,600 Wisconsin lakes: two printable pages, made for the boat. This is the real sheet for Lake Kegonsa.



LAKE SHEET lakesheet.com · free

Saturday, October 10, 2026
lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

LAKE KEGONSA

Dane County, Wisconsin · WBIC 802600

3,200	32 ft	4	Low
ACRES	MAX DEPTH	LAUNCHES	CLARITY

DEPTH IN FEET

5' 15' 20' 25' 32' 20' 10' 30' 30' 25' 5' 15' 10'

0 32 ft · ✕ Deepest spot, 32 ft · ▲ Public launch. Traced from the DNR survey map. Not for navigation.

BEST FISHING TIMES

All fish · Saturday

AM — Sunrise 7:04 am

PM — Sunset 6:22 pm

Good · Fair · Slow

Best windows today, all fish
6:30 am–8:00 am · 11:30 am–1:45 pm · 5:15 pm–6:45 pm

Times by species available in **Premium** · lakesheet.com/premium

WIND & WEATHER

National Weather Service

81° / 59°
HIGH / LOW

0%
RAIN

Sunny
MIDDAY SKY

No frost
LOWS ABOVE 34°

10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
8a	10a	12p	2p	4p	6p	8p	10p	12a

Wind in mph by hour · shaded = breezy, 10+ mph

Wind blows toward the north shore. Baitfish pile up on the windy side; fish follow.

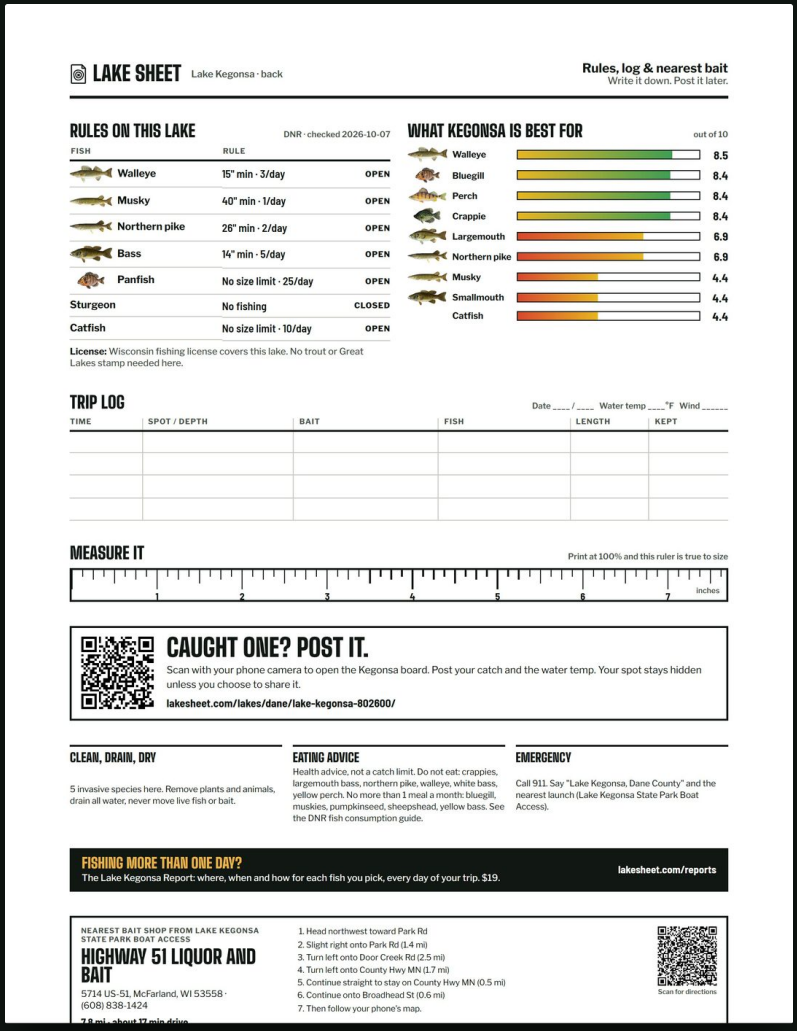
7:04 am	6:22 pm	12:38 pm	0%
SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON OVERHEAD	NEW MOON

Sources: Wisconsin DNR (lake facts, rules, survey map), National Weather Service. Sun and moon computed for the lake. Best times are a model of light and moon, not a promise. Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the DNR.

1. **Depth map** traced from the DNR survey, deepest spot marked (traced lakes)
2. **Lake facts:** acres, max depth, launches, clarity
3. **Best times** from the sun and moon on AM and PM dials
4. **Wind and weather** by the hour, and which shore the wind hits
5. **Sun and moon** times for the lake
6. **Sources and date** on every fact

THE BACK OF THE SHEET

RULES, LOG & NEAREST BAIT



LAKE SHEET Lake Kegonsa · back

Rules, log & nearest bait
Write it down. Post it later.

RULES ON THIS LAKE

DNR · checked 2026-10-07

FISH	RULE	
Walleye	15" min · 3/day	OPEN
Musky	40" min · 1/day	OPEN
Northern pike	26" min · 2/day	OPEN
Bass	14" min · 5/day	OPEN
Panfish	No size limit · 25/day	OPEN
Sturgeon	No fishing	CLOSED
Catfish	No size limit · 10/day	OPEN

License: Wisconsin fishing license covers this lake. No trout or Great Lakes stamp needed here.

WHAT KEGONSA IS BEST FOR

out of 10

Walleye	8.5
Bluegill	8.4
Perch	8.4
Crappie	8.4
Largemouth	6.9
Northern pike	6.9
Musky	4.4
Smallmouth	4.4
Catfish	4.4

TRIP LOG

Date ____ / ____ Water temp ____°F Wind _____

TIME	SPOT / DEPTH	BAIT	FISH	LENGTH	KEPT

MEASURE IT

Print at 100% and this ruler is true to size

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 inches

CAUGHT ONE? POST IT.

Scan with your phone camera to open the Kegonsa board. Post your catch and the water temp. Your spot stays hidden unless you choose to share it.

lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY

5 invasive species here. Remove plants and animals, drain all water, never move live fish or bait.

EATING ADVICE

Health advice, not a catch limit. Do not eat: crappies, largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, white bass, yellow perch. No more than 1 meal a month: bluegill, muskies, pumpkinseed, sheepshead, yellow bass. See the DNR fish consumption guide.

EMERGENCY

Call 911. Say "Lake Kegonsa, Dane County" and the nearest launch (Lake Kegonsa State Park Boat Access).

FISHING MORE THAN ONE DAY?
The Lake Kegonsa Report: where, when and how for each fish you pick, every day of your trip. $19.
lakesheet.com/reports

NEAREST BAIT SHOP FROM LAKE KEGONSA STATE PARK BOAT ACCESS

HIGHWAY 51 LIQUOR AND BAIT

5714 US-51, McFarland, WI 53558 · (608) 838-1424

7.8 mi · about 17 min drive

1. Head northwest toward Park Rd
2. Slight right onto Park Rd (1.4 mi)
3. Turn left onto Door Creek Rd (2.5 mi)
4. Turn left onto County Hwy MN (1.7 mi)
5. Continue straight to stay on County Hwy MN (0.5 mi)
6. Continue onto Broadhead St (0.6 mi)
7. Then follow your phone's map.

Scan for directions

1. **This lake's rules** for every fish, from the DNR
2. **What the lake is best for,** rated by fish
3. **Trip log** and a true-size **ruler**
4. **Invasive species** and eating advice
5. **Nearest bait shop** we know of, with turn-by-turn directions
6. Scan to post your catch

lakesheet.com

Find your lake, print it, take it in the boat

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is built to be used on the water and on the ice. Read Chapter 1 once so you know a yellow perch from a white perch, a ruffe and a small walleye. After that, jump to the month you're fishing in Chapter 3, pick a lake in Chapter 8, and use Chapter 7 to plan where to start on it. If you fish mostly in winter, Chapter 6 is the heart of the book.

IF YOU HAVE ONE EVENING

1. Look up your lake's free Lake Sheet (page 2).
2. Read your month in Chapter 3.
3. Rig the drop-shot or the ice jig from Chapter 5 or 6.
4. Fish the morning or late-afternoon window on the sheet's best-times dials.

IF YOU'RE NEW TO PERCH

1. Chapter 1: what you're after, and what it isn't.
2. Chapter 4: buy the budget kit, about $100–125.
3. Chapter 5: learn the bottom rig and the bobber first.
4. Chapter 11: the questions everyone asks.

The QR codes. Most lakes named in this book have a code. Scan it with your phone camera and you land on that lake's free Lake Sheet: depth map, best times from the sun and moon, wind, launches, the nearest bait shop and the lake's own rules.

The rules. Perch rules are not the same everywhere. Inland lakes, Green Bay and Lake Michigan each have their own season and bag, and many inland lakes have their own panfish limit. Rules in this book are for the 2026–27 season. Before you keep a fish, check the current rules. The fastest way for an inland lake is the rules box on its Lake Sheet.

About the pictures. Fish photos in this book show "a fish," never a species. Many perch photos online are really the European perch, a different fish that doesn't live in Wisconsin. To learn what a Wisconsin yellow perch looks like, use the illustrations in Chapter 1.



CHAPTER 1

MEET THE YELLOW PERCH

The yellow perch is the fish that fills more Wisconsin frying pans than any other, and the one most ice anglers are really after when they drill that first hole of the winter. It is a small cousin of the walleye, it lives in schools, it feeds by day, and it tastes as good as anything that swims. Everything about catching perch comes back to those three facts: find the school, fish in daylight, and keep the bait near the bottom.

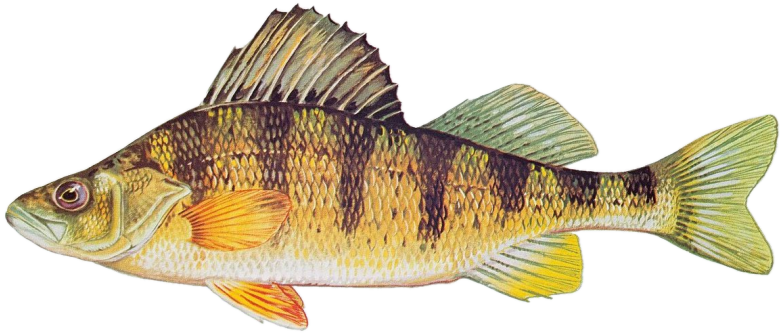
1.1 How to tell a yellow perch · **1.2** Lookalikes · **1.3** Not a European perch · **1.4** Size, age and growth · **1.5** Schools and daily life · **1.6** What perch eat · **1.7** Spawning · **1.8** Stunted perch

1.1

HOW TO TELL A YELLOW PERCH

YELLOW PERCH

Perca flavescens



TELL IT BY	Golden-yellow sides with six to eight dark vertical bars, two separate dorsal fins (the front one with 12–14 sharp spines), and no large canine teeth.
LOOKS LIKE	Walleye and sauger (canine teeth, no bold bars), white perch (silvery, no bars), ruffe (no yellow). Many online 'perch' photos are the European perch, a different species not found in Wisconsin.
COLOR	Green to golden-brown back, golden-yellow sides, white belly. Lower fins yellow to orange, brightest on spawning males.
SIZE	Adults average 7–10 inches; some reach 14. Great Lakes perch often run 8–12 inches; a 12-incher weighs about a pound.
WISCONSIN RECORD	3 lb 4 oz — Mike Lamont, Lake Winnebago, 1954. Live-release record 16.75 in, Green Bay (Oconto Co.), 2025.
EATS	Insect larvae, zooplankton, small fish and minnows, worms and crayfish. Feeds near the bottom by day.

Wisconsin anglers call it perch, lake perch, ringed perch, striped perch or "jumbos" when they're big. The DNR lists the common names yellow perch, perch, lake perch, river perch, striped perch, ringed perch, American perch and common perch. The scientific name, *Perca flavescens*, means roughly "dusky fish, turning gold": *Perca* means dusky and *flavescens* means becoming gold-colored.

The marks that matter:

- **Six to eight dark bars** run down golden-yellow sides, over a green to golden-brown back, fading into a white belly.
- **Two separate dorsal fins** on the back. The front one has 12 to 14 sharp spines. The back one has 2 spines and 12 to 14 soft rays.
- **No big teeth.** Perch have bands of small, brush-like teeth. Walleye and sauger have sharp canine teeth.
- **Lower fins** are often yellow to orange-red, brightest on males in spring.
- **Body shape:** about 3.5 times as long as it is deep, deeper-bodied than a walleye.

Color changes with the water. Young perch, and perch from clear, weedless lakes, are paler. Perch from stained or weedy water are often deep gold.

MIND THE SPINES

The front dorsal fin is sharp enough to puncture skin. Grab a perch by sliding your hand from the head back, folding the fin down, not from the tail forward.

1.2 LOOKALIKES



FIG 1.1 **Walleye.** Same family. Big glassy eye, sharp canine teeth, white tip on the lower tail. No bold bars.



FIG 1.2 **White perch.** Not a true perch. Silver with no dark bars. An invasive fish in Green Bay and Lake Michigan.

	YELLOW PERCH	WALLEYE / SAUGER	WHITE PERCH	RUFFE
Sides	Gold with 6–8 dark bars	Walleye: olive-gold, faint saddles. Sauger: bold dark blotches, spotted first dorsal	Silvery, no bars	Brownish, spotted, no yellow
Teeth	Small, brush-like	Sharp canines	Small	Small

Where in Wisconsin	Statewide	Statewide	Green Bay, Lake Michigan and their rivers	St. Louis River and Lake Superior's western end
Rules	Panfish	Walleye rules	Open all year, no bag on Green Bay and Lake Michigan	No open season

Small walleye are the lookalike that gets anglers in trouble: a 9-inch walleye on the ice is still a walleye, and walleye have their own size and bag limit. Check for the canine teeth and the white tail tip.

White perch have spread in Green Bay. In the DNR's 2024 Green Bay trawl survey they were the most abundant fish caught, and anglers on the bay kept an estimated 87,495 of them that year. They are legal to keep in any number. Don't count them toward your yellow perch bag, and don't release them alive somewhere else.

Ruffe are an invasive fish from Europe found in the St. Louis River and the nearby bay of Lake Superior. They lack the yellow color. There is no open season for ruffe. If you catch one, Wisconsin rules let you kill it and take it to a DNR office so it can be reported. Never keep one alive.

1.3
NOT A EUROPEAN PERCH

Search "perch" online and many of the pictures you'll see are the **European perch** (*Perca fluviatilis*), a close cousin from Europe and Asia. It looks a lot like ours, but it is a separate species and it does not live in Wisconsin. European perch usually show bright red-orange lower fins and tail. Yellow perch fins are more often yellow to amber. Because the two are so easy to mix up in photos, this book never labels a photo of a fish as a yellow perch. Use the illustration on the fact card to learn the fish.

USE IT

When a magazine or a lure package shows a "perch" with fiery red fins and a deep, humped back, it's probably a European fish. Match your lure colors to what Wisconsin perch really look like: gold, olive and dark bars.

1.4
SIZE, AGE AND GROWTH

Most Wisconsin yellow perch are 7 to 10 inches long. A few reach 14 inches. Lakes with stunted perch may have adults that are only 4 to 6 inches. In the Great Lakes, perch of 8 to 12 inches are common, and a 12-incher weighs about a pound.

AGE	TYPICAL LENGTH	TYPICAL WEIGHT
1 year	3–5 in	0.03 lb (half an ounce)
3 years	5–9 in	0.18 lb (3 oz)
5 years	7–10 in	0.38 lb (6 oz)
7 years	10–11 in	0.68 lb (11 oz)

From the Wisconsin DNR's yellow perch species leaflet (2008). Growth varies a lot from lake to lake.

Perch grow fast in length for their first two years, then put on more weight than length. They live about seven years and start spawning at age 2 or 3. Females grow larger than males, so most "jumbo" perch over 11 inches are females.

What that means on the water. A 4-inch perch is usually a one-year-old. A 2-year-old is often 5 to 7 inches. A 12-inch perch has usually lived most of a perch's life, and on many lakes it is rare.

The records. Wisconsin's hook-and-line record yellow perch weighed **3 lb 4 oz**. Mike Lamont caught it on Lake Winnebago in 1954, and it still stands. The live-release (length) record is **16.75 inches**, caught by Nash Lemerond on Green Bay in Oconto County on June 20, 2025. The DNR leaflet gives the world record as 4 lb 3.5 oz, from New Jersey in 1865.

1.5
SCHOOLS AND DAILY LIFE

Yellow perch are school fish. By day they gather in spindle-shaped schools of 50 to 200 or more, usually all about the same size and age. Schools of small perch stay shallower than schools of big perch. As evening comes,

schools move toward shore. After dark, when they can no longer see each other, perch spread out, settle on the bottom and stay still. At daybreak they school up again and move back out.

Through the year they follow a pattern: in toward shore in spring to spawn, out to deeper water as the water warms, and into very deep water in winter. On some Wisconsin lakes, ice anglers catch perch in 40 to 60 feet of water.

Perch are tough. They can live in water with little oxygen, so they can use deep basins in winter that other fish avoid, and they often survive a winterkill that wipes out bluegill, bass and walleye. After a winterkill, a lake often has excellent perch fishing for several years.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

- **Find the school first.** Catch one perch and there are dozens more nearby, all about the same size.
- **Small fish? Move.** If you keep catching 5-inchers, that school is small fish. Go find a school of bigger ones, usually deeper.
- **Fish in daylight.** Perch feed by sight during the day, especially early morning and late afternoon. Night fishing for perch is usually slow.

1.6

WHAT PERCH EAT

Young perch strain tiny animals (zooplankton) out of the water and pick insects off the bottom. As they grow, minnows and small fish make up more and more of their meals. The DNR describes them as slow, deliberate bottom feeders that eat almost anything, but prefer minnows, insect larvae, plankton and worms. Crayfish and fish eggs are on the menu too.

Perch nibble rather than strike. With no big teeth, they pick at bait, which is why they are such good bait thieves. That's also why small hooks, light line and sensitive rods catch more perch (Chapter 4).

Perch are also food. Walleye, bass, northern pike and muskies all eat them, and a perch-colored lure is one of the best walleye lures there is. Lakes with good walleye often have good perch, and lakes with too few predators often have too many small perch.

1.7
SPAWNING

Yellow perch spawn soon after the ice goes out, usually in April or early May, when the water is about 44 to 52°F. On Green Bay, the DNR treats 50°F as the temperature at which spawning begins. It follows the walleye spawn and often comes at the same time as the sucker run.

- **Where:** perch prefer weeds or sunken brush, but also spawn on gravel, sand or rubble. In the Great Lakes they spawn mostly on sandy bottoms.
- **How:** males arrive first. One female may be followed by 15 to 25 males. She lays her eggs in a single gelatinous ribbon with accordion folds. No nest, and no parent guards the eggs.
- **The egg ribbon** can be up to seven feet long and hold up to 210,000 eggs, though the average ribbon holds about 28,000. It drifts until it snags on weeds or brush.
- **Hatching** takes 8 to 10 days, longer in cold water. The fry are under a quarter-inch long and live on their yolk for 3 to 5 days.

SPRING PERCH

Before and during the spawn, perch crowd into shallow, weedy bays and harbors. That's why the first few weeks after ice-out can be the best shore fishing of the year on many lakes. Green Bay and Lake Michigan close their perch seasons during this time; inland lakes stay open.

1.8
STUNTED PERCH

On some lakes, almost every perch is 4 to 6 inches long. Biologists call that a stunted population: too many perch for the food, and too few predators to thin them out. The DNR's main fix is stocking walleye, which eat the small perch and let the survivors grow. In lakes and flowages without weeds, clubs and the DNR sometimes sink fish cribs of pallets, brush or Christmas trees to give perch a place to spawn.

REMEMBER

- Find the school, then find the right-sized school.
- Daylight is perch time. Morning and late afternoon are best.
- Keep the bait near the bottom unless your sonar shows otherwise.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Sitting on a school of 5-inchers all day.
- Using big hooks. Perch nibble; small hooks catch.
- Mistaking a small walleye or a white perch for a yellow perch.



CHAPTER 2

WHERE PERCH LIVE IN WISCONSIN

Yellow perch are a glacial-lake fish, and Wisconsin is a glacial-lake state. They live in most of the lakes and ponds the glaciers left behind, in every major river system, in Green Bay, along the Lake Michigan shore and in Lake Superior's Chequamegon Bay. This chapter covers the four kinds of perch water, how the big waters are doing right now, and how to tell in two minutes whether your lake has perch worth chasing.

2.1 Statewide range · **2.2** Inland lakes · **2.3** The Winnebago system · **2.4** Green Bay · **2.5** Lake Michigan · **2.6** Rivers and border waters · **2.7** Does my lake have perch?

2.1
STATEWIDE RANGE

Perch are native to all three of Wisconsin's drainage basins: Lake Michigan, the Mississippi and Lake Superior. The DNR says they are common in all major river systems, especially where rivers are dammed into flowages. The one part of the state where they are scarce is the unglaciated Driftless Area of the southwest, which has few natural lakes.

The DNR's own list of well-known perch lakes includes Lake Mendota (Dane County), Geneva Lake (Walworth), Pewaukee Lake (Waukesha), Lake Poygan and Little Lake Butte des Morts (Winnebago system) and Arbor Vitae Lake (Vilas). All of them have a free Lake Sheet:

LAKE	COUNTY	SHEET	LAKE	COUNTY	SHEET
Lake Mendota	Dane		**Lake Poygan**	Waushara	
Geneva Lake	Walworth		**Little Lake Butte des Morts**	Winnebago	
Pewaukee Lake	Waukesha		**Big Arbor Vitae Lake**	Vilas	

2.2
INLAND LAKES

Inland lakes are where most Wisconsin perch are caught, and where the rules are the most generous: open all year, with a bag of 25 panfish on most lakes (Chapter 9).

How Lake Sheet data shows it. The DNR fish survey doesn't list yellow perch on its own. It lumps bluegill, crappie, perch and the other panfish together as **"Panfish."** Of the 4,042 lakes with a Lake Sheet as of October 2026, the survey lists panfish in 3,837, and calls them **abundant** in 506. The counties with the most "abundant" panfish lakes: