

Freshwater Clydesdales: Carp!



Huge carp await your bait in quiet New Jersey waters.

They lurk in the turbid waters of most ponds, lakes, and streams. Their gargantuan proportions are intimidating. Their strength is immense. What can they be? Carp, of course! These freshwater Clydesdales will give the most robust

angler a bone-jarring run-off and “smoke” even the best fishing reels. With all this excitement, why don’t more anglers fish for these giants? Well, many consider carp to be “trash” fish and very unattractive. To borrow from comedian Rodney Dangerfield: Carp get no respect.

Captain Henry Robinson of New York first introduced the carp to North America in 1831. This parent stock was shipped across the Atlantic Ocean from France. Introductions into the United States continued and by 1877, the common carp was well established throughout the nation.

The common carp, *Cyprinus carpio*, is a copper-colored cousin of the minnow. Carp are late-spring spawners, waiting until the water temperature ranges between 63° to 79° F. Depending on water depth, spawning occurs during the first two weeks of June. During spawning rituals, carp move into grassy shallows.

Carp have a soft, fleshy mouth with two sets of barbels or “whiskers”. Carp, like catfish, have thousands of taste receptors located along the length these barbels. During their normal foraging routine, carp root around in the bottom sediments

sucking in insects and other invertebrates. But carp are not choosy; in addition to insects, they will devour almost any kind of vegetable matter. And they certainly have a sweet tooth. Any carp angler who has used dough balls sweetened with molasses, mulberries or even blueberries, will swear carp love to binge on sugar.

Veteran carp fisherman Don Harris offers advice for carp-fishing amateurs. His first rule: avoid using floats or sinkers, which create a taut line that carp seem to detect. If a weight is needed for casting purposes, use a fish-finder rig that allows the fish to take the

bait without feeling the weight of the sinker.

Ideally, the spot chosen for fishing should have calm water. Harris contends that quiet water will also make chumming more effective. That’s right, *chumming* for carp; and niblet corn is recommended. Once the corn is thrown into the water, use dough balls or more corn to bait the hook. Use a bronzed #8-14 bait holder hook.

It is not uncommon to see their serrated dorsal spine protruding from the water, as many carp bow and arrow anglers can verify.

Carp have an extremely long life span of 12 to 20 years, probably because they are not a favorite among anglers. The current state-record carp, caught on the South Branch of the Raritan River, weighed 47 pounds, measured 38 inches long, and had a 32-inch girth—a colossal specimen by anyone’s standards.

Harris also recommends chumming be done a day or two before the fishing excursion to condition the carp in the area.

Now comes the waiting game. A beach chair and rod holder will make a long stay at the fishing grounds more comfortable. Remember, carp stay away from taut lines, so the reel should be in free spool or the bail on a spinning reel should be flipped over. Sit back and get ready to grab the reins, because you may be in for the ride of your life!

If you’re lucky, you might land a good meal. Carp as table fare? Yes, believe it or not, carp have been eaten for thousands of years. The Jewish delicacy gefilte fish is often made with carp. Small- to medium-size carp (four to five pounds) are the perfect food specimens. Fish markets sell carp live as well as cleaned, iced and smoked. Smoked carp is usually sold skinless; the meat is reddish or orange in color, cut into strips and sometimes highly spiced.

Try the following carp recipe, created by Izaak Walton, the 17th-century English angler-conservationist who wrote the literary classic “The Compleat Angler.”

Split open a carp, scour well and place in a large pot. Take a handful of fresh sweet marjoram, thyme and parsley and a sprig of rosemary. Then, place these in the carp along with four onions, 20 pickled oysters and three anchovies. Next, pour claret wine over all, and season the claret well with salt, cloves, and mace, plus rinds of oranges and lemons. Cover the pot and place on a quick fire until sufficiently broiled. Remove the carp, and lay it on a large dish with broth. Garnish with lemons and serve.

The carp is a fish to be taken seriously. Carp is the most popular gamefish species in Europe. Maybe the Europeans know something we don’t. Only a limited number of New Jersey anglers target their efforts toward these big fish. And those folks are having the time of their life. So, don’t miss out. Go carp fishin’.

— Hugh Carberry, Supervising Fisheries Biologist

Don Harris, a carp fisherman for more than 45 years, shares this dough ball recipe:

Carp Dough Balls

- 1/2 cup corn meal
- 1/2 cup wheat flour
- 1/2 cup oatmeal
- 3/4 cup water
- four cotton balls
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar

In a large mixing bowl, combine all ingredients and knead thoroughly with hands into a dough-like consistency. Place the dough onto a sheet of foil large enough to bring the edges up to enclose the dough. Bake at 350°F in a conventional oven for 30 minutes.

Remove from oven and let cool for 10 minutes. Go carp fishing!

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