

# Smallmouth Bass



The *smallmouth bass* (*Micropterus dolomieu*) is a [species](#) of [freshwater fish](#) in the sunfish [family](#) ([Centrarchidae](#)) of the [order Perciformes](#). It is the [type species](#) of its genus. One of the [black basses](#), it is a popular game fish sought by anglers throughout the temperate zones of North America, and has been spread by stock to many cool-water tributaries and lakes in Canada and more so introduced in the United States. It attains a length of up to 27 inches and 12 pounds. The smallmouth bass is native to the upper and middle [Mississippi River](#) basin, the [Saint Lawrence River–Great Lakes](#) system, and up into the [Hudson Bay](#) basin. Its common names include **smallmouth**, **bronzeback**, **brown bass**, **brownie**, **smallie**, **bronze bass**, and **bareback bass**.

The smallmouth bass is generally brown (seldom yellow) with red eyes, and dark brown vertical bands, rather than a horizontal band along the side. There are 13–15 soft rays in the dorsal fin. The upper jaw of smallmouth bass extends to the middle of the eye.

Males are generally smaller than females. The males tend to range around two pounds, while females can range from three to six pounds. Their average sizes can differ, depending on where they are found; those found in American waters tend to be larger due to the longer summers, which allow them to eat and grow for a longer period of time.

Their habitat plays a significant role in their color, weight, and shape. River water smallmouth that live in dark water tend to be rather torpedo-shaped and very dark brown to be more efficient for feeding. Lakeside smallmouth bass, however, that live in sandy areas, tend to be a light yellow-brown to adapt to the environment in a defensive state and are more oval-shaped.

They have been seen eating [tadpoles](#), fish, aquatic insects, crayfish, anything that they could swallow, they will. They have been seen eating frogs, small mice, small birds, and even [French fries](#).<sup>[2]</sup> In the United States, smallmouth bass were first introduced outside of their native range with the construction of the [Erie Canal](#) in 1825, extending the fish's range into central New York state. During the mid-to-late 19th century, smallmouth were transplanted via the nation's rail

system to lakes and rivers throughout the northern and western United States, as far as California. Shippers found that smallmouth bass were a hardy species that could be transported in buckets or barrels by rail, sometimes using the spigots from the railroad water tanks to aerate the fingerlings. They were introduced east of the Appalachians just before the Civil War, and afterwards transplanted to the states of New England.<sup>[8][9]</sup>

With increased industrialization and development, many of the nation's eastern trout rivers were nasty, polluted, or allowed to silt up, raising water temperatures and killing off the native [brook trout](#). Smallmouth bass were often introduced to northern rivers now too warm for native trout, and slowly became a popular gamefish with many anglers. Equally adaptable to large, cool-water impoundments and reservoirs, the smallmouth also spread far beyond its original native range. Later, smallmouth populations also began to decline after years of damage caused by overdevelopment and pollution, as well as a loss of river habitat caused by damming many formerly wild rivers to form lakes or reservoirs. In recent years, a renewed emphasis on preserving water quality and riparian habitat in the nation's rivers and lakes, together with stricter management practices, eventually benefited smallmouth populations and has caused a resurgence in their popularity with anglers.<sup>[8][10]</sup>

Today, smallmouth bass are very popular [game fish](#), frequently sought by anglers using conventional [spinning](#) and bait casting gear, as well as [fly fishing](#) tackle.<sup>[11][12]</sup> The smallmouth bass is one of the toughest fighting freshwater fish in North America.<sup>[13]</sup> In addition to wild populations, the smallmouth bass is stocked in cool rivers and lakes throughout Canada and the United States. In shallow streams, it is a wary fish, though usually not to the extent of most trout. The smallmouth is highly regarded for its topwater fighting ability when hooked – old fishing journals referred to the smallmouth bass as "ounce for ounce and pound for pound the gamest fish that swims".<sup>[14]</sup> Smallmouth bass are taken for the table, with filets of white, firm flesh when cooked.<sup>[15]</sup> Today, many fishermen practice catch-and-release fishing to improve fish populations.

The current all-tackle world record for a smallmouth bass is 11 lb 15 oz, caught by Casey Peters in the [Dale Hollow Reservoir](#), on the Kentucky/Tennessee border, in 1955.<sup>[16]</sup>