

Yellow Perch



Yellow perch is often recognized by its dark vertical stripes and gold or yellow body color. *Perca* is derived from early Greek for "perch" and *flavescens* is Latin for "becoming gold" or "yellow colored". Adult sizes typically range from 3.9–11.4 in (10–30 cm); though have been known to grow larger. The yellow perch has a laterally compressed body with an oval, oblong shape. The anal fins are a green or yellow-orange, the dorsal fin is an olive color, and the belly is cream-colored. The vertical bands fade as they near the belly. Spawning intensifies the bands in males, and they can be nonexistent in juveniles. The spiny anterior dorsal fin has 13 to 15 spines. The soft rear fins also have one or two spines, but which are mostly made up of rays that range from 12 to 15 in number. The pelvic fins are close together, and the homocercal caudal fin is forked. The [operculum](#) tip has one spine, and the anal fin has two spines. There are seven to eight branchiostegal rays. Yellow perch has many fine and sharp teeth. They are rough to the touch because of their ctenoid scales. Common names for the perch are yellow perch, American perch, and lake perch. Yellow perch are one of the smaller-sized members of the perch family ([Percidae](#)). Due to its ability to crossbreed and the similar morphology, the yellow perch is sometimes classified as a subspecies of the European perch.^[3] For over 100 years, Canada and the United States have been commercially harvesting yellow perch in the [Great Lakes](#) with trapnets, gillnets, and poundnets. In Canada, the estimated catch in 2002 was 3,622 tons with a value of \$16.7 million, second only to pickerel at \$28.2 million. The greatest demand in the United States is in the north-central region, where nearly 70% of all yellow perch sales in the US occur within 80 km (49.7 mi) of the Great Lakes. Yellow perch is one of the easiest fish to catch, and can be taken in all seasons, and tastes great. Therefore, it is a desirable sport fish in some locations of the US and Canada. It even makes up around 85% of the sport fish caught in Lake Michigan.

Yellow perch typically reach [sexual maturity](#) in 2–3 years for males and 3–4 years for females. They are [iteroparous](#), spawning annually in the spring when water temperatures are between 2.0 and 18.6°C. Spawning is communal and typically occurs at night. Yellow perch are [oviparous](#), as eggs are fertilized externally. Eggs are in a gelatinous strand (commonly 10,000-40,000), a characteristic unique among North American freshwater fishes. Egg strands are commonly draped over weeds, the branches of submerged trees or shrubs, or some other structure. Eggs hatch in 11–27 days, depending on temperature and other [abiotic](#) factors.^[2] They are commonly found in the littoral zones of both large and small lakes, but they also inhabit slow-moving rivers

and streams, brackish waters, and ponds. Yellow perch commonly reside in shallow water, but are occasionally found deeper than 15 m or on the bottom.^[3]

In the northern waters, females often are larger, grow faster, live longer, and mature in three to four years. Males mature in two to three years at a smaller size. Perch do not grow as large in the northern waters, but tend to live longer. Most research has showed the maximum age to be about 9–10 years, with a few living past 11 years. The preferred temperature range for the yellow perch is 17.6 to 25°C (63 to 77°F), with an optimum range of 21 to 24°C (70 to 75°F) and a lethal limit in upwards of 33°C (91°F) and a stress limit over 26°C (79°F). Yellow perch spawn once a year in spring using large schools and shallow areas of a lake or low-current tributary streams. They do not build a [redd](#) or nest. Spawning typically takes place at night or in the early morning. Females have the potential to spawn up to eight times in their lifetimes.^[3]

A small aquaculture industry in the US Midwest contributes about 90,800 kg (200,180 lbs) of yellow perch annually, but the aquaculture is not expanding rapidly.^[3] The yellow perch is absolutely crucial to the survival of the walleye and [largemouth bass](#) in its range.^[3] Cormorants feed heavily on yellow perch in early spring, but over the entire season, only 10% of their diets is perch.^[4] Cormorants and anglers combined harvest 40% of age-1 and age-2 yellow perch and 25% of the adult yellow perch population in [Lake Michigan](#). Total annual mortality of adult yellow perch has not changed since cormorant colonization.^[5]