



## Making a Hookout

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Some type of tool for removing hooks from fish is often handy. For smaller fishes, many anglers use a hemostat, needle holder or needle-nosed pliers. Specialized hook removing pliers are also available when grasping the hook firmly is required. In many situations, particularly when the fish are large and toothy or when they can inflict damage with heavy spines, a hookout is a useful tool. Many designs have evolved in various parts of the world depending upon the needs of the user and the materials that are available. One of the most simple designs is made from a length of rod. For a heavy-duty tool useful for large bluefish, pike or similar toothy species, a hookout made from 1/8 or 3/16 inch mild steel rod is adequate. About 19 inches of rod is needed to create the tool. Start by rounding the ends of the rod to eliminate sharp edges. Next form a triangular handle about 4 inches wide with legs about 3 inches long on one end of the rod. Then form a shallow hook (about 1/2 inch deep) on the other end.

A lighter and more salt resistant hookout can be made from brass rod, brass nuts and washers, and a piece of wood. Using a piece of wood of your choice that is slightly rectangular in cross section will permit constructing a slightly oval handle that will be stronger and allow better handling. A handle blank about 3 x 1 x 3/4 should be adequate. Drill a hole slightly smaller than the nut and just deep enough to hide it in the center of one 3/4 side. Then drill a smaller hole, just large enough to allow the rod to pass through it, through the center of that hole. Measure the length of the rod that will be required to pass completely through the wooden handle and thread a bit more than is required. Attach one brass nut to the rod, turning it down tightly against the unthreaded part of the rod. Press the other nut into the recess in the handle and screw the rod into it until the nut is firmly seated in the handle. Unscrew the rod from the handle and shape the handle to a comfortable oval with rounded ends using a sharp knife, rasp, and sandpaper. (A stationary belt or disc sander can speed this process considerably.) Mix up a small amount of epoxy and apply it to the threads on the rod and to the drill hole. Screw the rod back into the handle, drawing it up tightly against the handle on both sides, then set it aside to let the epoxy set up.

Once the epoxy has cured, set the rod in a vice or block that allows it to rest on the lower nut and gently peen the top of the rod to form a head that looks like a rivet. If desired, round the edges of the lower nut with a file to leave a smooth surface. Form a tight, shallow hook on the other end of the rod. This completes the metal work.

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Finish the wooden handle by applying several coats of a good spar varnish, sanding the first three coats down to bare wood after they have dried. This should produce a durable finish that will stand up to years of use without rot or excessive discoloration of the wood.

#### Using the Hookout

To use the hookout, hook it over the line or the hook and follow it to the bend of the hook. Then give a slight twist and pull to the hookout while applying tension to the line. Hookouts are most useful to the bait fisherman or the user of single hook lures that might be taken deeply. They allow the angler to put considerable pressure on the hook to remove it without causing excessive damage to the fish. Fish that are going to be released need not be handled at all if the hookout can reach the hook and the line can be controlled. The weight of even a modest sized fish is usually adequate to provide the force needed to release it. For those anglers who pursue toothy species, the hookout can save a lot of scrapes and cuts on the fingers and allow a quicker and easier release.