

SPRING CARPIN' PRIMER

by

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30+ LBS.



28 LBS. 6 OZ.

When Spring eventually rolls around, the water temps will rise and so will your chances to tempt 'ol bugle mouth. They say "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" and we love to see those great golden flanks resting in the bottom of a net. The **Common Carp** (*Cyprinus carpio*) found throughout New England should not to be confused with the high jumping Silver or Asian carp that have made the news headlines and countless YouTube videos.

Originally introduced in the mid-18th century, common carp were distributed by Congress to most US States as a means to help feed the growing population. Their ability to survive the polluted waters of the industrial revolution resulted in them being wrongly (and more often conveniently) blamed for the demise or decline of many native species. While still considered a trash fish by a few, the humble carp is rapidly gaining acceptance as a true and worthy sport fish by a growing number of enlightened anglers. And why not? What other freshwater fish grows as big or fights as hard?

Carp have superior senses and lightning –fast reflexes that can result in a lot of missed strikes especially when the bait is mounted on the hook. However, in recent years, the advances in modern carp fishing across Europe have led to some devastating effective ways to improve your chances of catching one.



Mirror Carp, 46.04 LBS.

The **Mirror carp** (*Cyprinus carpio*) are commonly found in the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. The current mirror carp world record is over 84 pounds. A good catch is pictured above.

There is a genetic, as well as a visual, difference between mirror and common carp. Historical records indicate the Mirror Carp was likely the first mutation of a common carp. Common carp have a regular scale pattern, whereas mirrors have an irregular and patchy scale pattern. This variant may have been bred in by monks trying to make it easier to prepare for eating. Interestingly, the shape of a Mirror Carp is similar to that of a dinner plate. The color patterns in a Carp are dependent on the water they come from.

They are identified by irregularly sized and shaped scales arranged on its body. Anglers claim to be able to identify individuals by the scale patterns. Fully-scaled Mirror Carps are covered in different size scales.

Mirror Carp prefer slow moving, warm water with abundant vegetation. They feed on plants and animals throughout the water column. Shallow areas, near moving waters, are the preferred breeding habitats. Mirror carp inhabit large water bodies of slow or standing water and soft, organic sediments. A schooling fish, they prefer to be in groups of a half a dozen. They can be found in fresh or brackish water with a temperature of 35 – 85 °F. Mirror Carp will survive in frozen over water if they have access to open water. Carp can tolerate summer water temperatures to the low 90's °F for short periods. They prefer 68 °F water.



Figure #1

Figure #2

HERALD THE “HAIR-RIG”

This novel technique suspends the bait an inch or two beyond the hook on a short length of line a.k.a. the “hair” (Figure #1). When the carp picks up the bait, they don’t immediately notice the hook (Figure #2) until it is well inside their mouths. As soon as they do feel it, their reaction is to eject the bait, but instead of blowing out the hook, the bait simply pivots around on the hair and actually helps to sink the point in deeper. The result is a self-hooked fish and a screaming run that could see your rod disappearing into the water unless you have a bait runner reel or loosened clutch. It’s happen plenty of times, so be prepared!



Figure #3

Figure #4

The hair rig is remarkably easy to tie, and while many improved or more complex versions exist, the original is still highly effective. Use about 12 inches of 30-pound braid tied with a knotless knot (Figure #3) to a size six or four heavy wire hook. The other end is connected to a swivel to create about an eight-inch hook length. Thread a one to two-ounce in-line lead onto your mainline, plus a plastic bead to protect the swivel knot connection, and you are ready to go (Figure #4). The bait is simply threaded onto the hair with a baiting needle and a simple stop inserted into the loop to keep it in place.



TEMPTING BAIT

Figure #5

One of the favorite baits is sweet corn (Figure #5), which works well on the hook but tends to be a little fragile on a 'hair'. A cheap and very effective alternative is feed corn (maize) which takes a little more preparation. The dry kernels should be covered in slightly salted water and soaked for about 24 hours before being boiled for 30 to 40 minutes. You can then add your favorite flavor or any of the sugary fruit drink mixes (Kool-Aid, etc.) to make the bait taste even more enticing. Thread two or three kernels onto your hair, throw some extra handfuls in as chum and you'll soon be hauling!

While it seems everyone has their own dough ball recipe for carp, some options are more effective when used with the hair rig. This includes a specialized dough ball that when cooked in boiling water for a couple of minutes becomes tough enough to stay on the 'hair'. These marble-sized baits, known as 'Boilies' (Figure #6), contain flavors and attractants that carp find simply irresistible. Boilies are becoming more widely available in North America and in the right hands can help the dedicated angler target some of the bigger carp to be found in New England.



Figure #6

TACKLING THE JOB

When you take a look at the vast array of specialized tackle that the European carp anglers haul down to the lakeside or river bank, you might be forgiven if you think that you'll need to do the same in order to be successful. In the right hands, modern carp gear can certainly improve your chances, but when starting out, no amount of expensive tackle will ever substitute for watercraft and angling skills. A heavy spinning or light surf rod combined with a spinning reel loaded with 15- to 20-pound mono is all you need to get started. A forked bank stick will keep the rod tip up and ready for action.

Take Mike Hudak (Figure #7) for example. In only his second season carp fishing, Mike landed a massive 43-pound, 12-ounce common carp (State Record) from the Connecticut River using his regular fishing gear that included a seven-foot spinning rod. Mike did however invest in a large landing net and an unhooking mat (a waterproof foam filled pillow to carefully lay the fish on that ensured his fish could be safely returned unharmed). Thanks to Connecticut DEEP, who have a progressive policy toward carp fishing, this magnificent fish could still be claimed as a record without it being killed or unnecessarily transported since it had been carefully photographed and weighed on certified scales at the place of capture. It is important to note that carp, like any big fish, should not be allowed to flap around on the ground or be lifted and weighed by the gills since this can cause fatal damage. Unhook and release most fish while the net is still in the water. However, if necessary take them out of the water, lay them carefully on an unhooking mat (Figure #8, a piece of two-to four-inch foam inside a heavy duty trash bag is a good substitute) and then use a ready-make sling or a large heavy duty plastic laundry bag that makes the weighing process a breeze. A couple of photographs will capture the memory and give you plenty of bragging rights before sliding the fish easily and gently back into the water (Figure #9).



Figure #7

Figure #8

Figure #9

PRIME LOCATIONS

As the days grow longer and the ice melts off the lakes and ponds, carp move out of the deeper water and begin to feed more steadily in the shallows. On sunny days, shallow areas that catch those warming rays heat up more quickly and can be a great place to fish. The bigger rivers can be hit or miss in the early part of the season as snow melts brings heavy flows and colder water. Sheltered coves, backwaters or eddies can be hotspots until the water levels drop back towards normal. Where regulations allow, steady chumming, especially a couple of days before you fish, will significantly improve your chances. When you do hook a carp, especially a big one, don't be in too much of a hurry to reel it in. A carp can easily make initial runs of 20 to 40 yards and sometime more-so make sure your reel clutch is not set too tight. When you finally get it close to the net, be prepared for some powerful surges as sometimes they never seem to give up!

It's finally 'cool' to say you fish for carp. So why not get out there and give it a go?



17 LBS. 4 OZ.

Additional information about these interesting fishes can be found at the links below.

Carp Anglers Group: www.carpanglersgroup.com

Common Carp: takemefishing.org/fishing/fishopedia/species-explorer/carp-common/

Common Carp: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carp

Mirror Carp: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_carp

Pond Life of Common Carp: www.pondlife.me.uk/koi/common.php