

Finding the Cure

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OUTDOORS GUIDE

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When it comes to steelhead fishing, it's hard to beat mother nature and drifting a perfectly presented roe bag past a trout's nose is about as close as you can come to a natural offering when trying to tempt an elusive steelhead to bite. Now you will likely meet some resistance when talking to fly anglers, and I am certain there are many fly anglers who can produce the same, if not better, than fishing with roe, but for me (and my limited fly fishing abilities), roe can be the ticket to a successful steelhead fishing trip. The big question for many when talking about fishing with roe is what to use, how to use it, and how to prepare it.

There are many options when looking at fishing with roe; fishing with artificial roe, commercially produced and cured roe, store bought cured and tied roe, and then roe that you have collected and harvested yourself. As simple as it can be to buy pre-tied roe bags, or artificial roe, I really enjoy catching steelhead on roe that I have cured and tied myself. As well, I believe my wife really enjoys me curing and tying roe on the coffee table in front of the TV each spring, as it never leaves a mess or smell in the living room.

When thinking about fishing with roe, the first thing to consider is the source. When using roe as bait, it is ultimately necessary to harvest a fish to obtain your roe. When talking to many steelhead anglers, killing a steelhead is something that doesn't happen all that often, as many dedicated steelhead anglers like to practice catch and release to ensure a quality fishery for years to come. Especially in light of the conditions of recent years, where in this area we have seen a significant decline in numbers of fish in many local rivers, harvesting fish in these rivers for roe can be doing harm to an already sensitive population. I try and obtain roe from other sources than some of the more popular local or north shore-rivers, that receive a substantial amount of angling pressure, and are showing a decline in numbers. I may harvest one fish a season, and try to take it from a river that gets less angling pressure, or one that is difficult to access or fish, so there is less pressure on the fish. Also, when I can, the source for much of my roe in the spring is collected in the fall when salmon fishing; bringing home one Chinook, either from the lake in the late summer, or from a river in the fall, can often provide more than enough eggs for a spring season and then some. I also collect roe from lake trout caught in the fall before the season ends, and find it works just as well. Some anglers also come across "loopers" which are rainbows stocked into

Superior in Minnesota. These are clipped fish, that seem to be more prevalent in certain north shore rivers, and are generally stocked by MN as a put and take fishery, and can be harvested without harming the natural steelhead population.

When collecting roe, the condition of the eggs depends on the time of year and how close that individual fish is to spawning; the eggs can be still in skein (the membrane that holds the eggs tightly together), loose inside the fish, or so close to spawning that they are spilling out when holding the fish. These are all useable, but may require a bit of a different approach when curing.

There are many different methods you can use to prepare roe for fishing, but simply, the most common are water hardening roe, or curing roe using some sort of commercial cure.

For a simple water hardening method, whether it is skein or loose eggs; keep a Ziploc bag on you, and when you harvest a fish, remove the eggs or skein, put them in the bag, and fill it with cold river or lake water. I usually gently flush the bag out several times until the water runs a bit clearer; then let it sit 10-20 minutes, replace the water and leave it a few more minutes, and then remove from the water. After this you can lay out the eggs, dry them somewhat, and tie them. After being water hardened, the eggs will last longer when fishing with them, and will still have the appearance of fresh eggs. After being water hardened, I find eggs will last at least a couple weeks in the fridge, and can also be frozen to keep them longer.

When looking at commercial cures, there is a multitude available, but my preference is the product "BorX O' Fire" from the company Pautzke. This is a cure that will provide you with very durable, long lasting eggs, that's incredibly attractive to steelhead. Here in Thunder Bay, I found it locally at D&R. It's a cure with a variety of colour options to match your preference, along with Pautzke's secret seasonings and Krill Formula, adding some colour extra scent, and some serious attraction to your presentation. It is an incredible simple cure to use, and can be used on both skein and loose eggs. For skein, you can cure the skein after cutting it into several inch chunks, or scrape the eggs from the skein, and for loose eggs, they can simply be cured as is. It's best to cure fresh eggs, and if possible, its best to bleed out the fish before removing the eggs, keep the eggs free of water, and get them in paper towel and cooling as quickly as possible (hopefully within 24hrs). When

your eggs are ready, put the eggs or chunks of skein into a ziplock bag, pour some BorX O' Fire over them, seal the bag up, and leave it in the fridge overnight. You can experiment with the amount of cure you use, as you want to ensure to use enough to properly cure the eggs, but overuse can dry the eggs out, so test it out until you become familiar with the product, but when used correctly, it can be a deadly steelhead bait. After curing they are ready to be tied, and are ready for the river.

After curing this way, eggs can easily last weeks, long enough to last the entire spring season, and can realistically last months in your fridge, just keep an eye to see if they start going a bit soft and losing their

shape(which is unlikely even after several months). If storing cured eggs for a prolonged period (even for the next spring) freeze them in a single layer, and then store them in small, airtight packages that can be defrosted each time you need some.

For a quick video laying out the basics of curing and tying your roe, visit www.tomarmstrongoutdoors.com to learn more.

