

A Key to Common Wisconsin Fish

Adapted from a fish key by WDNR Fisheries Biologist Steve Gilbert

1. a. Body has no large bony plates Go to #2
b. Body has several rows of large bony plates. Face has whiskers (barbels) and a sucker-like mouth **Lake Sturgeon**
2. a. One dorsal fin; no adipose fin Go to #3
b. Two dorsal fins that may be separated or joined and have distinct spines and soft rays; or may have one dorsal fin and an adipose fin Go to #7
3. a. Dorsal fin is short, much less than half the body length Go to #4
b. Dorsal fin is nearly half the body length or longer **Bowfin**
4. a. Teeth are very visible and sharp (Pike Family) Go to #5
b. Teeth are not visible; mouth is fleshy and sucker-like **White Sucker**
5. a. Tips of tail fin are rounded Go to #6
b. Tips of tail fin are pointed **Muskellunge**
6. a. Cheek and gill cover are fully scaled **Grass Pickerel**
b. Cheek and only upper half of gill cover are scaled **Northern Pike**
7. a. Adipose fin is present Go to #8
b. Adipose fin is absent Go to #19
8. a. Whiskers (barbels) are present Go to #9
b. Whiskers are absent Go to #13
9. a. Tail is rounded or slightly indented Go to #10
b. Tail is deeply forked **Channel Catfish**
10. a. Lower jaw does not protrude beyond upper jaw Go to #11
b. Lower jaw protrudes beyond upper jaw. Body has patchy, mottled markings **Flathead Catfish**
11. a. Anal fin has 15-24 rays; barbels are gray to black; tail fin is squarish and slightly notched Go to #12
b. Anal fin has 24-27 rays; barbels are whitish; tail fin rounded **Yellow Bullhead**
12. a. Side is mottled; pectoral fin spine has strong saw-like "teeth" **Brown Bullhead**
b. Side is not mottled; pectoral fin spine is "toothless" or has poorly developed "teeth" **Black Bullhead**

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- 13. a. Tail is deeply forked Go to #14
 b. Tail is only slightly forked or is not forked Go to #16
- 14. a. Mouth is not turned down Go to #15
 b. Mouth is turned down **Lake Whitefish**
- 15. a. Back and sides are densely-mottled **Lake Trout**
 b. Back and sides are not densely-mottled (scattered instead) **Coho Salmon**
- 16. a. Back lacks worm-like markings; lower fins lack white edge Go to #17
 b. Back has worm-like markings; lower fins have white edge **Brook Trout**
- 17. a. Lower fins are not speckled Go to #18
 b. Lower fins are speckled **Chinook Salmon**
- 18. a. Lateral line is pink and prominent **Rainbow Trout**
 b. Lateral line is not pink or prominent **Brown Trout**
- 19. a. Anal fin has two or fewer spines on leading edge (Perch Family) Go to #20
 b. Anal fin has three or more spines on leading edge (Sunfish Family) Go to #22
- 20. a. Teeth are not noticeable; tail lacks white tip Go to #21
 b. Teeth are very large; tail has white mark on lower tip **Walleye**
- 21. a. Dorsal fin is polka dotted **Sauger**
 b. Dorsal fin lacks polka dots **Yellow Perch**
- 22. a. Anal fin has four or more spines Go to #23
 b. Anal fin has three spines Go to #24
- 23. a. Body is silver with random black scales **Black Crappie**
 b. Body is not silver; black scales form lateral rows of spots **Rock Bass**
- 24. a. Mouth is very large; back of upper jaw extends to below or beyond eye. Go to #25
 b. Mouth is very small, back of upper jaw does not extend to eye Go to #26
- 25. a. Tip of upper jaw extends beyond eye **Largemouth Bass**
 b. Tip of upper jaw does not extend beyond eye **Smallmouth Bass**
- 26. a. Red spot is present at tip of gill flap **Pumpkinseed**
 b. Gill flap is all black **Bluegill**