

## Yellow Perch

*(Perca flavescens)*

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### What are yellow perch?

Yellow perch are a common fish species found throughout New York State including the wetlands sheltered by the eastern Lake Ontario sand dunes. They are easily identified by 5 to 9 vertical black bars along their long, thin yellow bodies. Adult yellow perch are small fish that generally range between 6 and 12 inches long. Although relatively small, yellow perch should always be handled with care. Anglers should avoid contact with their spines and plates that cover their gills. They are sharp!

### Where do yellow perch live?

Yellow perch are found in many habitats including shallow vegetated areas of ponds, lakes and streams where they move in large, loosely organized groups called "schools". Above all, they favor the habitat provided by weedy, warm water lakes.

### Importance

Although yellow perch are strong fighting fish, they are popular "panfish" that are easily caught and taste good. They are often one of the first fish species caught by children and beginner anglers across our state. Yellow perch are most active during the morning and evening hours. Anglers have success catching these fish during both summer and winter. In addition to adult yellow perch being a food source for humans, young perch are a crucial part of the aquatic food web. They are an important forage fish, or food source, for many larger game fish species.

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# Yellow Perch



Close-up view of a ribbon of yellow perch eggs out of the water and on a brushpile.  
Photo courtesy of Dr. David W. Willis, South Dakota State University

## Life cycle

Once they are three or four years old, yellow perch reproduce, or **spawn**, in April or May. Females **migrate**, or move, into the shallow areas of water where there is vegetation. Here they randomly release their eggs in long jellylike transparent ribbons from two to seven feet long. Small females may release as few as 3,000 eggs, while larger females may release up to 100,000. Males also migrate to the same location to randomly release the **milt**, or sperm, that fertilizes the eggs. The ribbons of eggs float until they stick to underwater or submerged vegetation. The fertilized eggs are protected by the jellylike ribbon, and the adult fish swim away and do not defend the eggs from predators.

Usually within a couple of weeks, the young yellow perch hatch. The young stay near the bottom of the water column and feed by reabsorbing their yolk sacs. After their yolk sacs are absorbed, the young yellow perch become more active, feeding on small **aquatic** or **terrestrial** (water or land-dwelling) insects. As they mature into adults, yellow perch eat insects, crayfish, and small fish.

## References

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- Smith C.L. 1985. The Inland Fishes of New York State. Albany (NY): New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. pp. 337-338.
- Werner R.G. 2004. Freshwater fishes of the Northeastern United States. Syracuse (NY): Syracuse University Press. pp. 263-264.



### Fun Fact:

Living eight or nine years, yellow perch can spawn several times in their lifetime.

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