



Opening Day Trout with Dough Baits

by *Braden Eisenhower*

photos by the author

It's go time. Buzzing alarms awaken anglers from their Saturday slumber. Reservoirs and streams across Pennsylvania swell with freshly stocked Brook Trout, Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout. Today, we greet them.

While catching enough trout to form a meal should not be the priority of the day, breaded fillets crackling in oil weigh on each angler's mind. It's no surprise that when 8 o'clock rolls around and lines enter the water, many anglers trust dough baits.

Luring trout with dough baits is a straightforward approach. Rigging methods require minimal terminal tackle, and scented dough attracts fish without imparting action.

Several manufacturers produce ready-to-fish dough baits in an array of colors. When fresh, the material floats.

Mold a pinch of dough around a size 12 or 14 treble hook. Use just enough material to conceal the hook.





Applying the correct amount of material to the hook, as shown on the left, can be the difference between limits and empty skillets. Yes, there is a hook inside the dough.

This ensures there is sufficient material to float the hook, but not so much that trout may peck at the dough without becoming hooked.

Add weight 18 to 36 inches above the hook to anchor the line. The space between the weight and the hook determines the distance the bait suspends off the bottom.

In streams, crimp one or two 3/0 size splitshot to the line at the desired depth. This method is inexpensive and quick to re-rig when snags occur. In lakes, consider a heavy worm weight ($\frac{1}{8}$ ounces or $\frac{3}{16}$ ounces) to reach depths exceeding 10 feet.

Many anglers prefer the worm weight method, better known as Carolina rigging, because the line passes through the weight, allowing trout to take the bait without feeling the resistance of the weight.

Tie in a swivel to stop the weight. As before, run an 18- to 36-inch leader between the swivel and the hook.

Any ultralight spinning or spincast outfit will perform well. Spool with 4-pound monofilament line and you're set. Pennsylvania allows three lines per angler.

It is important to maintain a semi-taut line to detect bites. This is easiest in creeks and streams, because the current provides constant tension.

Position yourself upstream from a pool, run or bridge. Approach from afar to avoid disturbing fish,

and settle into the spot a few minutes before casting.

Cast ahead of where you think the trout are holding. Watch for the line below the rod tip to jump. If there is no sign of a bite after a few minutes, lift the rod tip, and feed a bit of line from the reel. The current will drift the bait downstream. Make repeat casts to thoroughly cover the area.

When fishing reservoirs from a boat, use the wind to push the boat, removing any slack line. The goal is to drift along a breakline where the depth changes from shallow to deep. This requires constant adjustments with the trolling motor to stay on course.

From shore, employ a rod holder to keep the rod at a 45-degree angle. Reel in slack line once the rod is in the holder and the weight reaches the bottom. Periodic adjustments may be necessary depending on wind conditions.

Dough baits are prohibited on Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only waters. Anglers should be mindful of regulations and uphold catch and release ethics and safe handling practices. If intending to release all or a portion of your catch, a spoon or spinner may be a better option. Dough baits often become hooked too deep to allow for a healthy release.

When it comes to harvesting legal limits of trout from put-and-take waters, dough baits are the *crème de la crème*. ☐