

## RAISING CRICKETS FOR FISH BAIT

James T. Davis\*

Crickets generally are considered one of the most effective baits for both sunfish and catfish. They are especially effective for big bluegill in the summer and late fall.

Crickets are usually abundant in May, June and late in the fall. They may be found under piles of decaying plants in the garden, in the lawn or around the edge of a field. During most of the year, however, they are hard to find and are always difficult to catch.

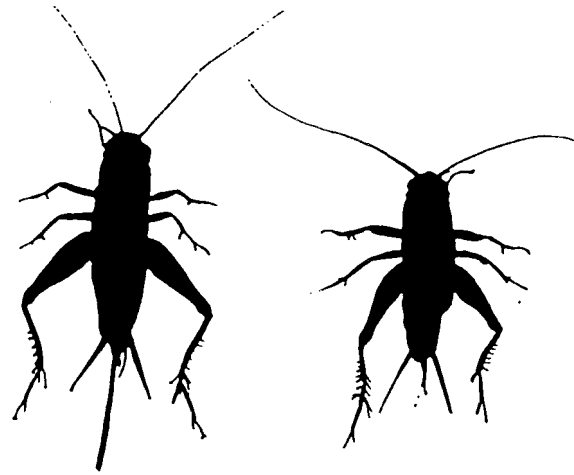
Two species of crickets can be raised rather easily. They are the black field cricket and the Australian grey cricket. The black crickets can be caught anywhere outdoors, but the grey ones have to be purchased from commercial dealers.

### Life Cycle

Cricket eggs are laid in moist soil or sand and will hatch in 15 to 25 days, depending on the temperature. Young crickets resemble the adults, but they do not have wings. Their rate of growth is dependent upon the temperature. There is practically no growth below 70 degrees F. The growth is quite rapid between 80 and 90 degrees F. Above 95 degrees, there is practically no growth. At low temperatures, the crickets will live for long periods. High temperatures which retard growth, also tend to shorten the life of crickets and prevent normal reproduction. At 80 degrees F, the young crickets become large enough for use as bait within a month, but it takes about 3 months for them to reach full maturity.

Mature crickets can be recognized by the long wings which cover the rear of the body. Mature females lay eggs at intervals of 30 to 60 days. Crickets of all sizes normally are found in the brood pens at any time.

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*Mature crickets have long wings that cover the body and the female has a long ovipositor for placing eggs into the soil.*

### Equipment

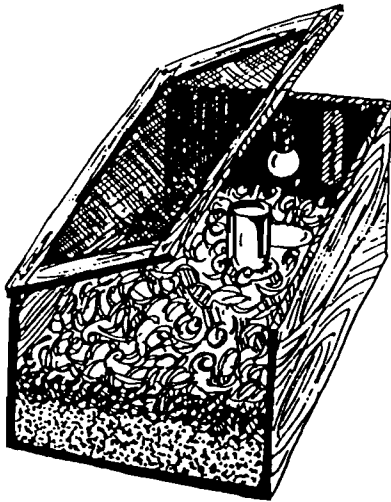
Excellent results have been obtained using metal cans with a minimum depth of 18 to 24 inches and as wide as possible. Garbage cans, lard cans or metal drums without tops, metal troughs, tin-lined boxes or other similar receptacles are satisfactory. A wooden box can be used if certain precautions are taken. The cans or brood boxes should be placed in the basement, garage or in a vacant room.

Crickets must have protection from ants, spiders and other parasites. To keep the brood pen free of ants, set the box on legs and place each leg in a large can of water or oil. The same arrangement will work for a can. If the can is placed in a larger container of water, ants cannot cross the water to the cricket brood pen.

Clean the inside of the rearing can or brood pen thoroughly and make it as smooth as possible with fine sand paper 8 to 10 inches from the top. Then coat this area with a good grade of floor wax and polish the area with cheese cloth. Apply two coats of wax. This

wax barrier will prevent the crickets from climbing out of the can or brood pen.

After the container has been thoroughly cleaned and waxed, put in 4 to 6 inches of clean, fine, moist sand. Moist sand is necessary for crickets to lay eggs. If the sand feels wet to the hand, it usually is wet enough for hatching the first crop of crickets. While the young crickets are growing, keep the sand relatively dry to control disease problems. Usually the sand does not need mointening again for about 3 months. By this time, the young crickets have matured and are ready to lay eggs.



*A good brood pen contains 4 to 6 inches of fine sand, 4 to 5 inches of wood excelsior, a drinking water supply, a food tray, a thermometer and a light bulb for heat.*

Place about 4 to 5 inches of wood excelsior over the sand. This provides cover for the young crickets and an additional surface for them to rest on.

When large brood pens are used, screen the tops to keep the crickets from jumping out and to prevent other animals from entering the boxes.

The crickets also need a place to drink. A glass jar drinking fountain such as is commonly used for watering baby chicks is satisfactory. This normally consists of a

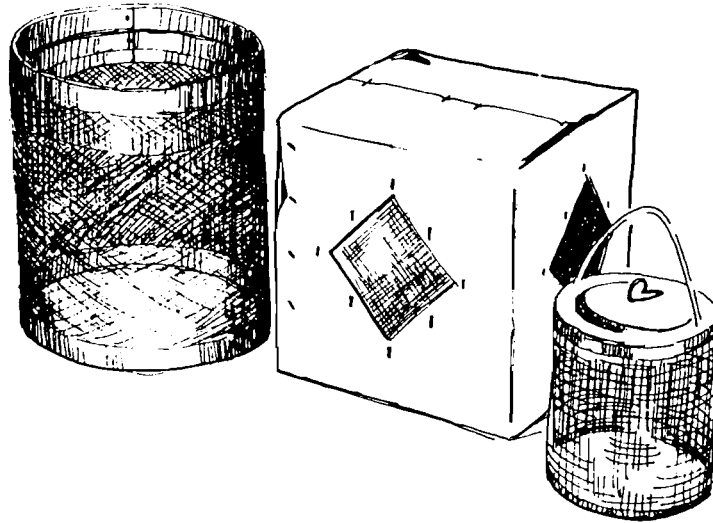
quart fruit jar inverted in a saucer-like glass dish. Fill the saucer with cotton slightly above the water level. This will allow the young crickets to obtain water from the moist cotton without drowning. The cotton also tends to prevent mosquitoes from breeding in the saucer. Place the drinking fountain on the sand in the center of the rearing can. The water supply should be replenished, the saucer cleaned and the cotton replaced every 4 to 6 weeks.

Chicken laying mash is an excellent feed for crickets. Place it in a saucer pressed down into the excelsior. This will enable baby crickets to reach the food. Small crickets usually consume a saucer of mash in about 2 to 3 weeks. As they grow larger, they eat the same amount in about 4 to 5 days. No other feed is necessary.

#### **Stocking Brood Pen**

Allow 2 square feet of rearing space for each 20 to 30 adult crickets. The male-female ratio should be about 50-50. You can determine sex of crickets because the female has a long tube at the rear end which deposits eggs in wet sand. Examine the brook pen every 3 to 4 days for about 2 weeks and remove any dead crickets. If adult, winged crickets are unavailable, young crickets may be used, although it will be longer before eggs are laid.

During the summer months, crickets grow rapidly without additional heat. To rear crickets during the late fall, winter or early spring, provide additional heat. The use of electric lights for heat has proved more satisfactory than trying to regulate the temperature of an entire room. Crickets move toward or away from a light bulb as they become too cold or too warm. Electric light bulbs usually are suspended in the brood pen within 5 to 6 inches of the excelsior. Cover the top of the can with cardboard, paper or cloth. Be careful to prevent the bulb from touching the excelsior or it might cause a fire. The crickets also could walk up the light wire and out of the brood pen. The size of the light bulb depends of the size of the rearing can and



*The shipping container in the center is adequate for 1-2,000 crickets while the bait containers on each side can hold 100-200 crickets for a fishing trip without loss.*

the outside air temperature. A brood pen 2'x2'x2' in an unheated room requires a 100-watt bulb in the winter and a 40-watt bulb during the cooler spring months.

If crickets do not move closer to the bulb during a cool period, the can probably is too warm. In such a situation, replace the bulb with one of a lower wattage. Under these circumstances, a bulb lasts about 2 weeks.

### **Rearing**

As soon as the crickets become large enough for use as bait, remove the heat. If they are kept in a cool place, they will grow very slowly and remain the right size for bait several months. Many people like to raise large crops of crickets during the warm fall months when it is more economical and keep them in an unheated room throughout the fall, winter and early spring. If more crickets are needed, add heat to one of the brood pens to stimulate growth and reproduction.

Normally a maximum of four crops of crickets can be raised in a can without cleaning or restocking. Larger crops can be raised when the cans are thoroughly cleaned after every one or two crops. As to production, 400 crickets normally can be raised every 3 months in a 2-foot square container. A smaller or larger can will produce proportionally more or less. Normally 2 pounds of chicken mash are required for each 100 crickets produced.

Crickets can be carried to the fishing pond or lake in almost any container that provides shade and free movement of air. A wooden bottom with galvanized screen wire sides and a cover to prevent the crickets from jumping out comprise most bait cricket boxes. To ship crickets a sturdy box that allows for air movement is a necessity. Wood excelsior should be placed in the box loosely to keep the crickets from piling up in the corners and smothering.

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