Beginner's Guide to: Crappie Fishing

Spring / Summer 2025

CottageTIPS
MAGAZINE

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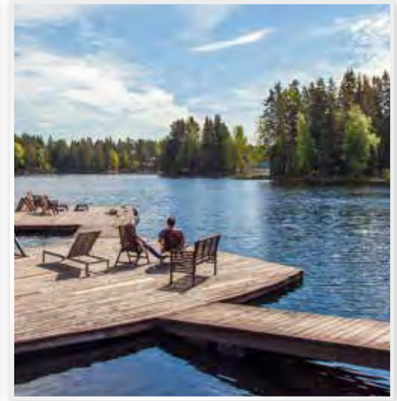

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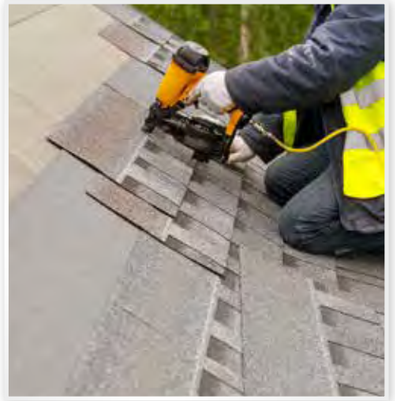

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Welcome Back to the Cottage!

Few activities are more Canadian than spending a weekend at a cottage with family and friends. We use this time to strengthen relationships, reflect on what's really important to us, and to recharge our energy before heading back to the daily grind in the city.

Home-cooked food is definitely one highlight of the cabin experience. Preparing meals that are tasty, yet easy to make and quick to serve, however, can be a challenge. This is particularly true when we head to the cottage for the opening weekend. Time is short and work needs to get done to prepare the cabin for the season. With this in mind, be sure to check out Kathy's cottage chili recipe. It might just hit the spot.

The cottage market could catch a new tailwind this year as lower interest rates give families more flexibility. At the same time, retirees who own property south of the border are considering selling and investing their money closer to home. Our tips for buying a cottage are worth a read if you are planning to take the plunge.

Existing cottage owners are fully aware of the challenges that come with owning a property in the Canadian woods. Going to war with mice, for example, is an annual sport at some cabins. Our article on the subject provides some useful tips for surviving the battle with the resident rodents.

People often take their pets to the cottage. This can help deter the mice from entering the cabin, but bringing the family dog or cat to the lake comes with risks. New cottage owners and visitors to cabins might find our article on the subject helpful for minimizing surprises.

Maintenance is another annual cottage ritual. Getting projects done in an economical way can be a challenge. Simple repairs are certainly possible for most people to do themselves, even if they don't have a high level of handyman skills. Other jobs, however, are best left to the pros. We take a look at some reasons why it is probably a good idea to hire the specialists to fix the cottage roof.

Choosing a dock is one of the most important decisions cottagers make when building a new cabin or upgrading an old one. Fortunately, there are many options available to meet your budget and needs. The Cottage Tips team has put together a helpful guide to get you started on the dock search.

Once the new dock in in place, it can be the perfect spot to catch a cottage meal. On lakes and rivers where crappies are abundant, the tasty fish might be found near the dock in the spring, fall, or winter months. Our beginner tips for catching crappies will give you a head start on the fishing season.

In a world that is constantly changing around us, we can always find stability, peace, and tranquility at the lake. That's why the cabin is such a cherished place for one and all.

May your 2025 cottage season be the best one yet!

Andrew
editor@cottagetips.com

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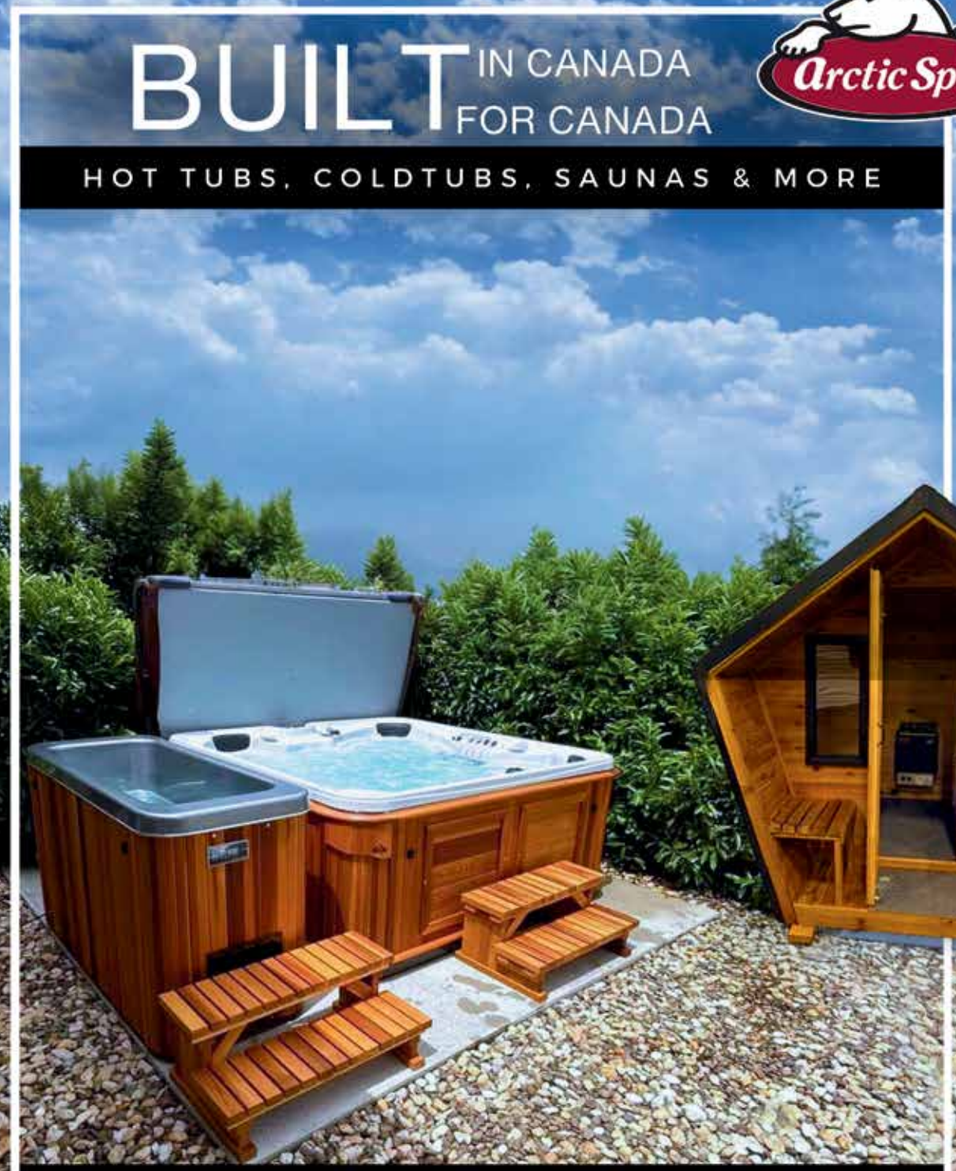

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Cottage Buying Guide

By Andrew Walker

Buying a cottage can be an emotional endeavour, as well as an expensive one. Purchasers want to do everything possible to make sure the process is a success.

TAKE YOUR TIME

Despite the size of the commitment, many people buy a cottage on impulse. They visit friends or family at a cottage for a weekend, decide they really enjoy the cottaging experience, and rush to acquire the first property they see in the same area.

While it is easy to get caught up in the excitement, and quick decisions sometimes work out, the smarter way to buy a cottage is to take your time. In the long run, you will probably be much happier and more comfortable in your little cabin on the lake.

RENT BEFORE YOU BUY

It is a good idea to rent a cottage in the target area for a couple of summers at different times in the season before you make a purchase. Boat traffic, water levels, and bug intensity can all vary considerably depending on the year.

If you plan to buy a remote-access cottage, renting is a great way to make sure this option actually suits your family. The idea of a secluded cabin sounds great, but it comes with a variety of extra issues that require some careful consideration. People at off-grid cabins will quickly realize how much they miss their hot water, fridge, and power for a computer. In addition, island properties are often far from medical facilities.

The social side of the cottage experience is also important to consider. Every cottage community has its own vibe. Spending time as a guest enables you to get a feel for the social environment to see if it fits your personality and your family's expectations.

FINANCING

The financial part of buying and maintaining a cottage is the number one issue that gets people into trouble after they take the plunge.

If you are going to borrow money, be sure to get a mortgage approval done before you start looking. It keeps you focused on your price range and provides the opportunity to move quickly when you find the perfect cottage.

BUDGETS

Create an annual budget before you get too deep into negotiations on a property. Talk to people who already own similar cottages to get a sense of their annual expenses.

Unless the cottage is located in an unorganized township, prepare for a nasty tax surprise. Property taxes can be substantial when the cottage lies within the nearest town's school district zone.

Electricity, phone, internet, generator fuel, and propane costs all need to be considered. Most cabins have a wood stove to provide heat, but many cottages also have electric baseboard heaters which can be very expensive to operate.

Don't underestimate boat expenses. Fuel costs for running around the lake all weekend can blow your budget right out of the water, especially if you plan to do a lot of wakeboarding, fishing, or full-day cruises.

Properties on islands come with extra expenses. You require a place to leave the car while you are at the cabin, and somewhere to dock the boat when you are in the city. Check with the existing owners to find out what they pay for marina services. Don't forget to factor in your winter storage costs for the boat.

MAINTENANCE

Unless you are buying a brand new cottage, be prepared for significant annual maintenance work and outlays. Harsh winters take a toll on the dock and cottage roof, while mischievous critters regularly break through screens and chew through floors and walls. Chainsaws, generators, lawnmowers, and water pumps all require annual TLC.

RENTAL INCOME AND INSURANCE

Are you planning to rent out the cottage to generate income for part of the season? If so, be conservative about your net income estimates. The extra costs associated with finding renters and cleaning up after they leave will eat into the additional cash.

Contact your existing insurance company to get an estimate for what you will pay to add the cottage to your homeowner policy.

BEST TIME TO BUY

The fall and winter are generally the best times of year to get a good deal on a cottage. Many cottage sellers will set optimistic prices in the spring. If the property doesn't sell during the summer months the owners become more willing to negotiate in the fall or the winter.

When you plan to get serious, consider hiring a real estate agent who owns a property in the same area. Even if a cottage that interests you is being sold privately, it is often worth having an expert adviser during the process.

If you miss out on a purchase, don't worry. Cottages are constantly hitting the market and another opportunity that suits your needs will emerge.

To buy the cottage or cabin you have always dreamed of, be patient and wait for the right place at the right price. The process will test your resolve, but you will be rewarded in the end.

How to Choose a Cottage Dock

By Cottage Tips Staff

Cottage owners have several types of docks to choose from when building a new cabin or replacing an old dock structure.

Docks are typically categorized as either permanent (fixed) docks or floating docks. In certain conditions, however, cottagers can get away with a simple roll-in dock.

FIXED DOCKS

On lakes where water levels don't change, winter ice isn't an issue, and the lake depth is shallow, a permanent dock might work. In this configuration, the structure is fixed to the bottom of the lake and remains in place all year.

A drilled-pipe dock is commonly used when bedrock exists to support the dock. Holes are drilled into the rock and the steel pipes are inserted, forming the base on which the steel dock frame is built. Winter tends to be the best time to install this type of dock, as the drilling can be done through the ice.

When the conditions are not suitable for pipes, the best option for the permanent dock is to use cribs. These are boxes made with strong timber and filled with rocks. The frame is then built above the cribs.

The benefit of a permanent dock is that you don't have to remove it in the fall when you close the cabin.

FLOATING DOCKS

Floating docks vary widely. The best dock to install depends on a number of factors, including the shoreline conditions, the way you use the dock, and your budget. Deck material for a dock can be wood, composite, metal, or plastic. The decision on which material to choose depends on cost, dock use, and how you want the dock to look.

Many cottages have a floating dock that attaches to a ramp, as well as a permanent gangway installed above the high-water point. A floating dock provides good flexibility. Sections can be added easily and the dock is often disconnected and placed in a bay to spend the winter. Boards on the dock ramp can be removed and set aside until the spring. The ramp is often hoisted up in the air during the winter months.

WOOD

A wood dock is usually the cheapest frame option for a floating dock, although surges in lumber prices can narrow the gap between the cost of using wood compared to steel or aluminum. Cedar is a good choice due to its resistance to the weather, although many docks are also built with pressure-treated wood.

Wood docks make sense in situations where the dock isn't subjected to strong winds or high waves. The downside is that a wood dock will eventually wear out from heavy use and exposure to the elements. Maintenance is required to keep it in good shape and boards might need to be periodically replaced.

STEEL TRUSS

Docks that need to endure large waves, strong currents, or high winds might require a steel frame. The steel-truss dock frame tends to be more expensive, but the dock can withstand a challenging environment and should last longer than a wood dock. This would probably be the best dock to install when your cottage is on a lake with very rough water conditions.

ALUMINUM

Aluminum-truss docks are similar to steel-truss docks in their design, but they are not as heavy. People often chose aluminum for the attractive look. Aluminum frames tend to last longer than wood, but might not offer the same strength as a steel-truss dock.

PLASTIC

Low-maintenance plastic docks are also popular. Sections can be combined into various formations and often have useful add-ons such as ports for PWCs or kayaks. The material lasts longer than a standard wood dock and there is variability in the dock design. This is a good option for situations where a cottage owner's docking needs might change in the next few years.

LIFT-UP DOCKS

In some cases, a combination dock system might work best in shallow water. Commonly called a lift-up dock, this type of dock has legs that sit on the bottom of the lake during the summer, but the entire kit is raised out of the water using a winch to protect it during the winter.

The frame of a lift-up dock is typically made with aluminum. Deck boards are removed and stored for the winter months. This option has a low impact on the environment and is becoming more common.

DOCK ACCESSORIES AND HARDWARE

Cleats, bumpers, storage boxes, solar lights, ports, and swimming ladders are common accessories for a dock. Some cottage owners also install a fish-cleaning station!

Cottage Roof: DIY or Hire a Pro?

Deciding between the DIY option and using professional roofers requires some careful consideration. Repairing or changing the cottage roof can be an expensive project, so you want to get it right.

In an effort to reduce costs, many cottage owners lean towards doing the roof themselves, but the actual savings might not turn out to be as big as expected.

By Cottage Tips Staff

MATERIAL COSTS

Contractors generally get a better deal than retail customers on shingles, wood, metal and other materials needed to repair or replace a roof. The pros also know exactly what to order, and already own the tools needed to get the job done right.

LABOUR COSTS

Inviting friends and family over for the weekend to help with the roof repair might sound like a cost-effective way of getting the roof done, but the reality can turn out to be quite different.

Expenses for food, drinks, transportation, and pocket money can quickly add up. If the team isn't as efficient as expected, a project that was supposed to take two days can quickly turn into one that has to be done over the course of two or three weeks. In addition, the help can suddenly become unavailable once everyone realizes how difficult it is to be a roofer.

DISPOSAL COSTS

In many cases, you have to remove the old shingles and take them to the landfill site or transfer station. Normally, that requires a trailer, a dumpster, or several trips with a boat and a pickup truck. Fuel, rental costs, and disposal fees must be considered when making the calculations. Again, roofing contractors already have the proper equipment, and are generally better at waste-disposal planning.

QUALITY OF WORK

Roofing isn't an easy job, and things can go sideways pretty quickly. The end result could be a much more expensive project than it would have been to simply hire the pros. In the worst-case scenario, you could end up with a major leak and run into trouble with the insurance company because the roof wasn't installed or repaired properly.

WEATHER CONDITIONS

Cottage country tends to see some unpredictable weather. As such, it is best to get a roofing job done as quickly as possible. Being caught with an exposed roof and limited help to cover it up when a storm arrives is a bad situation.

LIABILITY

Family and friends who volunteer to help often have a broad range of handyman capabilities. Not everyone will be familiar with safety procedures on a job site. This has to be considered when people are climbing ladders and using nail guns for the first time, or carrying heavy bundles of shingles. An accident can turn into a big problem, both financially and for the relationship.

VALUE OF LOST TIME

The most important consideration when deciding whether to do your own roof or hire contractors might simply come down to the value you place on your time. If you have limited time available to enjoy the cottage, do you really want to spend those precious days slugging shingles up the ladder and boiling away under the summer sun?

A cabin owner with the required skills and equipment might be able to get the job done in a way that is cost efficient. The majority of cottager owners, however, should probably leave the roofing work to the professionals who do it every day.

Kathy's Cottage Chili

Chili is a great meal to serve on the opening weekend at the cottage. It warms us up when the weather is cool, while providing the energy we need to battle through the cottage chores.

INGREDIENTS

1 kg of lean ground beef (2.2 pounds)
1 can of tomato sauce 680ml (23 ounces)
1 can of tomato paste 398ml (13.5 ounces)
1 can of diced tomatoes 540ml (18 ounces)
1.5 cups of chicken stock
1 or 2 cans of dark red kidney beans
1 onion - chopped
1 cup of celery - chopped
1 carrot - shredded
2 cloves of garlic - minced
2 packages of chili seasoning mix

THE GEAR YOU NEED

Large stock pot or Dutch oven
Shredder or slicer - for the carrot
Mincer - for the garlic

HOW TO PREPARE THE CHILI

In the pot or Dutch oven sauté the onions, carrot, and celery until tender. Remove them from the pot and set them aside.

In the same pot, brown the ground beef, draining off any grease or liquid in the bottom after browning.

Next, add the onion, carrot, celery, and garlic to the browned meat.

Mix in the packets of chili seasoning while stirring the chili well.

Now add the chicken stock, tomato paste, and tomato sauce to the meat mixture while stirring and cooking for 2 to 3 minutes.

Add the diced tomatoes and kidney beans (including the juices).

Let the entire mixture simmer for 2 to 3 hours.

Consider preparing this recipe ahead of time in the city before driving to the cabin. It freezes well and is quickly reheated on the stove or in the microwave at the cottage.

Freezing the chili in serving-size bags or containers is a good way to keep other food cold inside the cooler on the way to the cabin. Containers can then be washed and used again later, making this an efficient and garbage-free meal.

Preparation Time: 25 minutes
Baking Time: 2 to 3 hours
Serves: up to 6 people

How To Pick Blueberries

By Cottage Tips Staff

Blueberry picking is a family tradition at many cottages. The best strategy for picking blueberries involves maximizing the harvest, minimizing bug bites, and avoiding bears.

Blueberry Picking Technique

Ripe blueberries will fall off the plant as soon as they are touched, so you need to have a good container that is easy to handle, yet large enough to make the work efficient. An empty plastic peanut butter jar will do the trick. To make sure you get as many of the berries as possible, simply place the plastic jar under the berries and use your forefinger and thumb to gently roll the blueberries off the plant and into the container.

This technique not only catches the most berries, it is also a good system for minimizing the amount of leaves, twigs, insects, and unripe berries that can find their way into the jar. Once your container is almost full, secure the lid and head back to the central collection pail. The last thing you want to do is drop an open container, spill the blueberries, and lose all the fruits of your hard labour.

Where To Find Blueberries

The best place to look for and collect blueberries is often a tightly guarded secret in many cottage communities. For first-time blueberry pickers, there are a few tips to help you find your own blueberry patch.

Blueberries are almost always found in open areas that have been deforested, or near shield rock that get lots of sunshine. The best time of year to find blueberries is generally the last two weeks of July, but this can shift a week or two depending on the year and the location.

In cottage country these spots are often found on islands, beside roads, or in areas that have been cleared, including along power lines. If your are exploring the lake, look for islands that have large areas of exposed rock and head for the high point of the island. Be sure to check if the island is privately owned before you go ashore.

Blueberry plants can be found in a variety of sizes depending on the conditions in which they are growing. Some grow like a small bush close to the ground while others stretch out like a plant and become quite tall, as high as a couple of feet. When picking blueberries from plants that are low to the ground, always lift the small branches to check for hidden berries underneath, as the best and biggest blueberries are often found this way.

Blueberry Picking Clothing

Insects and blueberry patches tend to go hand-in-hand. The best clothing for picking blueberries is a pair of loose jeans, thick socks, rubber boots, and a loose hoodie. If you have a long-sleeved shirt instead of a hooded sweatshirt, be sure to also wear a hat. The rubber boots are useful if the ground is damp, or if the area harbours lots of ticks.

Blueberry Picking Risks - Bears, Bugs and Burns

Bears rely heavily on berries for their summer diet and are often found spending hours on end lapping up the juicy fruit. When taking the gang out to your favourite blueberry spot, spend a few moments when you arrive to survey the area for bears, or evidence that the bears have recently visited. It is also a good idea to wear bear bells when walking to and from the blueberry picking area, as well as during the time you are in the patch. The last thing you want to do is interrupt a mother black bear with her young ones.

Insect repellent with a high concentration of DEET is important to pack when you prepare to head out to pick blueberries. Mosquitoes and deer flies can drive you mad and will impact the time you can spend collecting the berries, as well as the number of berries you will harvest.

Sunburn and dehydration are also concerns when picking berries. Always bring water to drink. Be sure to wear a big hat and apply sunscreen to all exposed areas of your skin, especially on the back of your neck.

By Cottage Tips Staff

How to Choose a Generator

A generator is an essential piece of equipment to buy for a remote cabin. Owning one is also a good idea for ensuring you have back-up power at a cottage with electricity service, especially when the cabin serves as your home for several months of the year. Generators range from permanent installations that are wired right into your home or cottage electrical panel to small portable units that are suitable for an off-grid site. The best generator to buy depends on how long you might need the power, how many appliances you intend to connect, and how easy it is to move the generator to the cabin and around the property.

PERMANENT STANDBY (FULL-HOME) GENERATOR

The standby generator is a good choice for cottages that serve as permanent homes or for properties that require uninterrupted power. It automatically turns on when the power goes out and will allow you to comfortably continue living in the building during a storm outage. Standby generators have the capacity to provide the electricity needed to keep all appliances and the heating system running.

This is the most expensive generator option and requires the installation of a permanent fuel supply, which is normally a large propane tank. In areas where the property is served by natural gas, the generator can connect to your natural gas service.

If you want a 100% guaranteed source of electricity 24/7 a full-home generator is the way to go.

PORTABLE GENERATORS

A portable generator is handy for off-grid or island cabins that need power once in a while to run tools or other small electrical items. It is also a good option for cottages connected to the grid, but suffer from power outages during storms.

The smallest generators are the lightest and easiest to transport, but they also have low wattage. For example, a 1500-watt generator might be good to run a couple of lights, the modem, computers, and maybe the TV.

At a minimum, you probably want a generator with 3500 or 4000 watts. This will also keep a small fridge going and can run the water pump. It is powerful enough for tools and equipment used around the property for construction projects, as well. Once you get to this size, or larger, the units start to get heavy and they are difficult to move around. Keep this in mind if your property is not flat.

The standard portable generators run on gasoline or diesel fuel. They are noisy and produce smelly exhaust. It is important to ensure the generator is run at the recommended distance from the building.

INVERTER GENERATORS

Inverter generators are common for RVs, camp sites, and boat trips. These light-weight units are designed to provide power for a few small appliances. Inverter generators are quiet compared to the standard portable generators and have the benefit of being able to produce DC power, which can be stored. They normally run on propane.

APPLIANCE WATTAGE CHART

Here are some examples of the wattage required to run certain appliances. These are minimum amounts to use as a rough guide. Large fridges, pumps, or water heaters will require more power.

TABLET	**5**
LAPTOP	**20**
LIGHTS	**100**
SMALL FRIDGE	**200**
FREEZER	**500**
HOT PLATE	**1000**
SPACE HEATER	**1500**
WATER PUMP	**2000**
WATER HEATER	**4500**

When choosing the size of the generator, you have to add up all the appliances you intend to run at the same time to determine the amount of wattage needed. In most cases, you simply want to cover the basic needs of the cabin.

In addition, there is a difference between the starting power (surge power) required to get an appliance going and the running power. For example, a small fridge might require 1000 starting watts, but only 200 running watts. If the generator does not have the ability to handle the surge when an appliance starts you might need to use appliances in stages or consider buying a larger generator.

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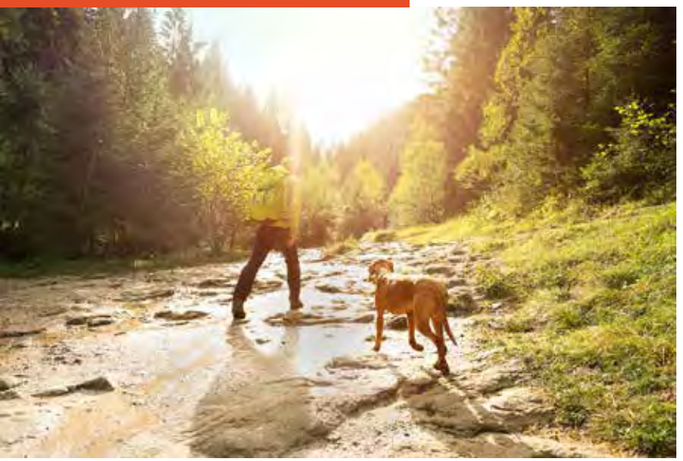

Pet Safety at the Cottage

By Cottage Tips Staff

ON THE ROAD - TRAVELING WITH A PET

Traveling in a vehicle can be stressful for pets. A small meal before you hit the road will put some food in the pet's stomach and reduce the chances of the animal becoming carsick.

1. Place the pet in the back of the vehicle and keep it in a travel cage or secured with a special pet seatbelt.

2. Maintain the temperature in the vehicle at a comfortable level.

3. Turn the music down. Your pet has very sensitive ears.

4. Plan regular food and toilet breaks that are convenient for both you and the pet.

5. Attach the harness or chain to your pet before you leave the vehicle at a rest stop. The animal may decide it wants to explore the new surroundings and you will lose valuable cottage time trying to get it back into the car if it gets away.

AROUND THE COTTAGE - HOW TO KEEP A PET SAFE

The forests and fields around a cabin can be dangerous worlds for Fifi and Fido.

Ensure you have the proper collars and medication to help fight ticks and fleas. Inspect your pet's fur every day for parasites. A quick stroll through the woods or long grass can result in dozens of ticks hitching a ride and making their way through the fur to a meal.

Write down the contact information for the nearest veterinarian in case your pet runs into trouble. Wildlife encounters often end badly for domestic animals. Porcupines and skunks might seem like interesting new friends, but the pet will quickly find out the feeling isn't mutual and a mouthful of quills or a blast of skunk spray will ruin the holiday.

Wolves, coyotes, and bears will kill your pet if they feel threatened or see it as an easy meal. Owls are also a risk if the pet is small and left outside in the evening.

Neighbours with guns might mistake your dog for another animal. Don't let the family pet wander off your property and get shot, or possibly injured in a trap.

Disease is another risk to consider. Rabies is rare but always a threat. Ensure the pet has had all of its required shots. Blastomycosis is a fungus found is some cottage regions and can be fatal for dogs. If the animal gets sick after a recent trip to the cottage, make sure the veterinarian is aware the dog has been in the woods.

ON THE WATER - PET SAFETY IN THE BOAT

Safety on the water is just as important for the family pet as it is for everyone else.
A pet lifejacket is a good idea when the animal is in the boat, especially in areas with strong currents and cold water.

Remove collars and chains before allowing the pet to swim near the shore. Submerged tree branches can easily hook the pet's collar and cause the animal to drown. Inspect your dog for leeches after it has been in the water.

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How to Deal With Mice At the Cottage

By Andrew Walker

The cottage-opening weekend is always a time of curious discovery, but one thing that is never a surprise is the mess left behind by our furry little friends during their stay at the cabin through the winter months.

For many cottage owners, the first day of the cottage year signals the beginning of an endless battle with the resident mice. Their presence is often heard at night, running up and down the walls or in the ceiling. Sometimes mice gnaw away at a floorboard, depriving cottagers of sleep. If the mice are nesting in the structure, it isn't long before the cabin becomes the playground for all the young ones.

Fortunately, keeping the little guests to a minimum is possible, but it requires commitment and resolve.

STEEL WOOL OR COPPER MESH

A popular deterrent involves the use of steel wool to seal all entry points the size of a dime or larger, especially near the support posts where they meet the cottage floor. Copper mesh can be used for larger openings.

Plugging holes is not a fun job, especially if you have to crawl under the cabin, but it can make a difference. On the effectiveness scale, the tactic makes sense and is probably worth a try.

MOTHBALLS

Scattering mothballs around the exterior support posts and underneath the cabin is another common practice used to deter mice. As a part of the winter closing ritual it probably doesn't hurt to try, but this isn't recommended in the spring, as the smell can creep into the cabin.

MOUSE BAIT

The use of poison is generally a bad idea. There is no guarantee the mice will actually eat the bait, and if they do, they might die in the walls and cause more grief.

In some cases, the mice simply taken the bait and hide it all around the cottage. That's not a good situation if kids are going to be at the cabin. Another downside is the potential impact on the predators in the forest that might eat the poisoned mice.

FABRIC SOFTENER

Keeping mice out of the cabin beds, blankets, cushions, sofas and dressers is key to ensuring good guest relations during the summer months. Seeing mouse poop on the cabin floor is frustrating, but finding it on the beds and in the cottage dressers is just too much for some cottagers to handle. This is especially true for renters and friends who are not accustomed to sharing their living spaces with the local wildlife. One popular solution involves placing strips of fabric softener on mattresses, pillows, and blankets and then covering them with thick plastic sheets. Strips of fabric softener can also go in the drawers of all dressers.

HI-TECH STRATEGIES

A quick online search will reveal a wide assortment of electronic devices that plug into the outlet and send off sonic vibrations that are designed to keep mice and a host of other unwanted guests away from the cottage. Considering the reasonable cost and the ease of use, I'd say give them a try.

MOUSE TRAPS

Traditional wooden snap-traps baited with peanut butter do an efficient job of eliminating mice that are in the cottage. Whether or not the technique is socially acceptable in our modern times is certainly up for discussion. I suspect there are people with strong opinions on both sides of the debate.

This strategy is definitely not for everyone. You have to get used to the loud "SNAP" and a bit of thrashing around when one of the little rodents gets caught in the middle of the night. These old-style traps can also be messy, but there is no doubting their effectiveness.

Be sure to check the traps daily and avoid leaving them set up while you are away from the cottage during the week.

Alternative traps are available that claim to be more humane in their approach to the issue. Try a few and see what works best in your particular situation.

CAN YOU WIN THE WAR?

The first step in the fight against mice at the cottage is accepting the fact that they will always be around. This might not be the advice new cottagers want to hear, but it is critical for mental wellbeing at the lake.

In the end, the small battles with the mice can be won, but the larger war will likely continue for years. It is just another part of the great Canadian cottage experience.

By Andrew Walker

The under-appreciated crappie might actually be the finest-tasting fish in cottage country. Finding and catching these fish, however, can be a challenge.

Beginner's Guide to: Crappie Fishing

Basic Equipment for Beginners

Crappies are small fish, and their bite is light, so you need to have sensitive gear to maximize success.

As with all fish species, there is a wide assortment of gear that is specifically marketed for crappie anglers, but you really don't need to splurge on specialty kit to catch these tasty fish.

In fact, a low-cost, light-action or ultra-light rod and spinning reel combination with 4-pound line should be more than adequate for new crappie anglers.

Many people prefer to use live bait to catch crappies, with minnows and dew worms (night crawlers) being the top picks. Anglers who prefer artificial baits can find success using small jig heads with plastic tails.

Where to Catch Crappies

In the spring the fish are often located in the shallow bays of lakes and rivers, which is where they spawn. When you finally locate one crappie you are likely to catch your limit.

These fish prefer to be near a source of protection to avoid larger fish, such as pike, that will feed on crappies. Try your luck near fallen trees or submerged brush.

In the summer, crappies tend to spread out and head to deeper water, making the fish harder to find. Anglers often catch them by accident when fishing for walleyes through the warmer months. Sometimes crappies are found suspended near the bottom around submerged structures.

In the fall, the fish will move back to shallower water as temperatures drop. According to the Ontario MNR, the best water temperature for a crappie is about 22 degrees Celsius (72 degrees Fahrenheit). If you are a serious crappie angler this information is important to consider. It might be the edge you need to end the day with a fine meal instead of an empty stringer.

Winter is a popular time to catch crappies. The fish are often located in shallow water in bays, or close to deeper drop offs in lakes and river systems. Crappies tend to stay suspended a few feet off the bottom. Fishing at night can be very productive.

Technique - How to Catch Crappies

In shallow water try a live minnow hooked through the back and placed on a line with a small bobber. Use a jig head with a minnow or rubber tail to find fish that are deeper. A slip bobber set-up can also be effective in this situation.

In winter, jigging can be an effective strategy. Drop the bait to the bottom and then reel it up a few feet. Use a jigging action to dance the bait to entice to fish to bite. A fish finder can be very useful to locate crappies at this time of year.

When you get a bite, remember to set the hook gently. A crappie has a very soft mouth.

A cottage treat

Crappies don't get the same attention as walleyes, or even perch in some areas, and much of that has to do with the fact that they are often difficult to find. However, with the right gear, perseverance, and a bit of luck you will catch your crappie limit this year and enjoy one of the finest meals available at the cottage.

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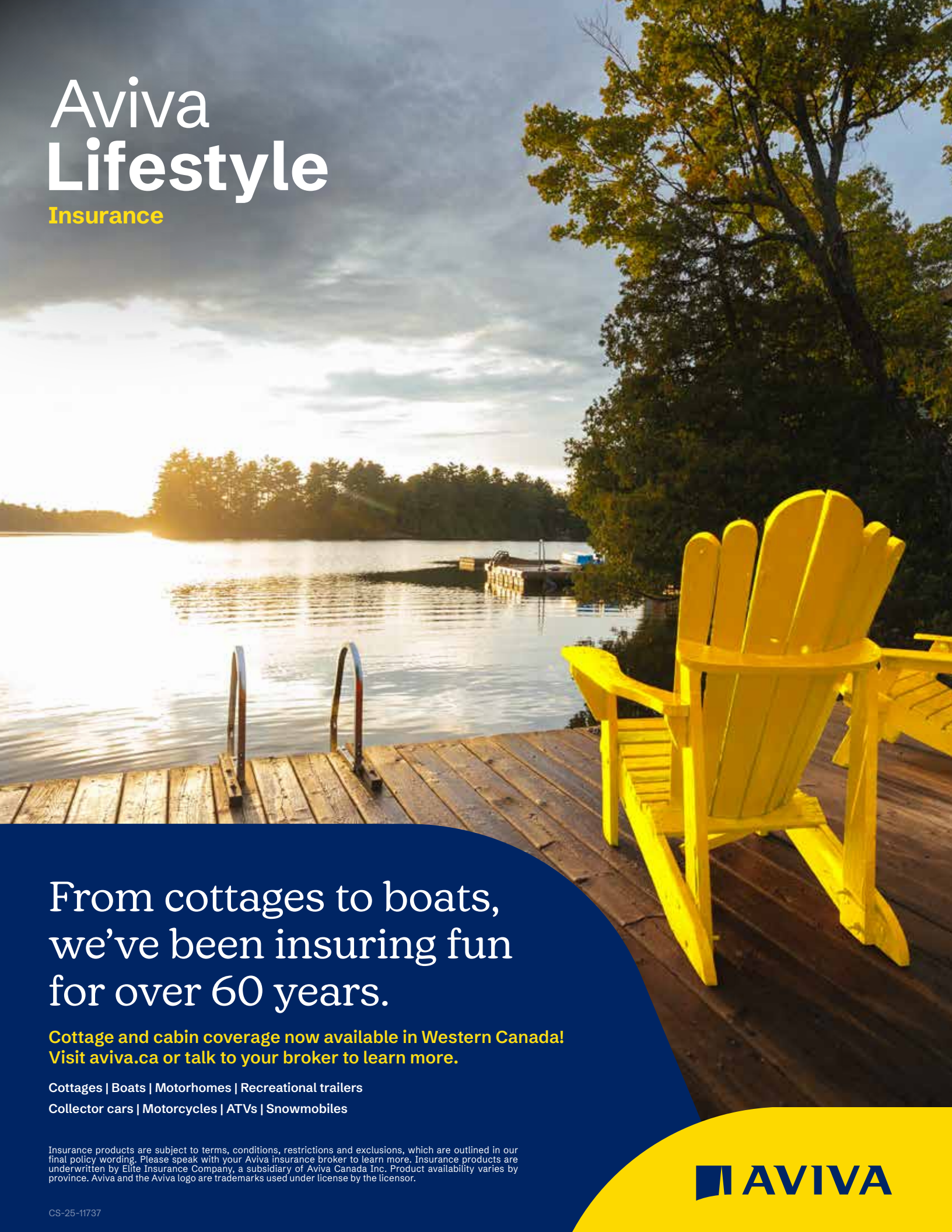

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