

How to keep minnows alive – or not!

There must be dozens of ways to keep minnows alive while a fisherman is traveling between his home and the water's edge. I probably have tried them all and am convinced that a simple, old-style clay brick holds the answer. I was fishing at the reservoir and noticed some old bricks that would be just right to put around a flower bed at home. Before leaving, I put a couple in the minnow bucket to carry with my four croppies. Usually, fish are belly-up within an hour, but when I got home they still were alive.

In fact, six or seven fish will stay alive for up to four hours if they are placed in water with a couple dry bricks. This is because when dry bricks are placed in water, it takes a long time for the water to displace all the oxygen trapped inside. As long as bubbles rise up, the water will be aerated. When the brick is removed after soaking for a day and a half, it will weigh almost twice as much. It is good to have extra bricks on hand because it will take at least two sunny days to dry them out thoroughly.

I've tried a lot of those little battery-charged gizmos that may work for a little while, but they always end up in the garbage can. Old used bricks aren't going to set you back, and they surely do not need care. Simply toss them in the trunk of the car, and when fishing is done for the day, put a couple bricks in the minnow bucket and drive home. I have kept minnows in a bucket for several weeks just by exchanging dry bricks for the soaked ones when the bubbles slow down. You must use old-style soft bricks; glazed or hard ones will not work. Just remember that it makes good sense to remove any minnows that might die. Others soon will follow if the water gets contaminated.

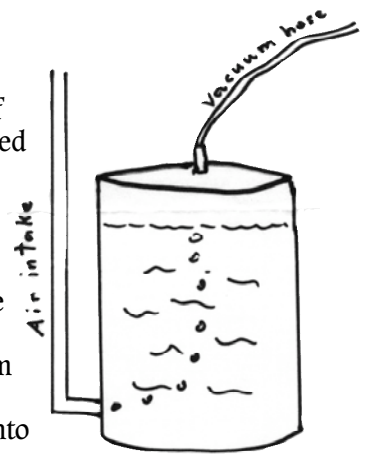
Let me tell you about another way I tried to keep minnows alive. It probably was in the early 1950s when I heard about a so-called "surefire" method. It consisted of an empty five-gallon paint can with a hole drilled on the side near the bottom. A length of copper pipe a few inches longer than the bucket was high and bent at a right angle and was soldered in the hole. This was to provide air to the fish in the bucket. Another short piece of copper pipe was sol-



Fisherman Paul Dyer

dered into a hole that had been drilled in the center of the tightly fitted lid. Attached to that was one end of about five feet of rubber tubing. The other end of the tubing was fastened onto the vacuum line of the windshield wiper. Back then, most cars had vacuum windshield wipers.

The idea was to pull air into the air intake pipe, force it through the water and then release it into the vacuum



Paul Dyer's "Or Not" method of keeping minnows alive.

system. I put it all together, put some water in the can, pressed the lid in place and tried it out on "Ginny," Dad's old Chrysler, that was sitting in the driveway. It worked great with the water gently bubbling in the closed can.

The next time we went fishing, it was all ready. Had we just stayed in the driveway, everything would have been okay. But with happy minnows swimming in aerated water, we headed for the lake. Dad's foot took its usual heavy position on the gas pedal, and the faster we went, the louder the bubbles sounded. Knowing the minnows would not last long in that roiling water, I reached over the front seat and slowly bent the air intake until the bubbling slowed way down. Then, confident in the success of this invention, we sped along for the next couple hours.

I checked on the minnows as soon as we reached the lake, but the bucket was gone! Nothing was left except for a flattened piece of metal. All of the water plus the minnows had gone up through the copper pipe on top of the bucket, through the tubing and through the carburetor.

You would have thought the car would have stalled or something, but Dad's old "Ginny" never coughed or hesitated all the way. I bet you could run a car on just plain water. Well, come to think of it, that was tried during World War II with water injectors. If the engine gets hot enough, it can run off anything. That old flattened bucket lay around for a long time and gave us a good laugh every time we saw it.

(Paul Dyer, a fisherman for many years, told this story to writer Lee Wallace, his sister.)