

# Build A Model Fish Rack



Every summer, Alaskans catch fish and dry them to last through the winter. They build racks to hold the fish while they dry. Try making your own model fish rack!

## Materials Needed:

Paper, pencil, scissors, glue, various craft supplies (straws, paperclips, clay, pipecleaners, toothpicks, rubber bands, popsicle sticks, yarn, etc.)

## Instructions:

**Step 1:** Draw a design for your fish rack. Think about how to make your fish rack strong, durable, and able to hold many fish.

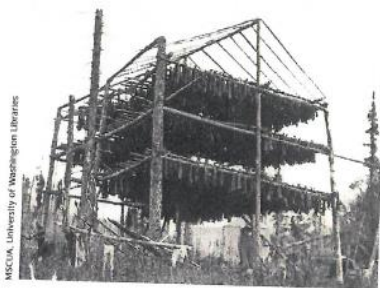
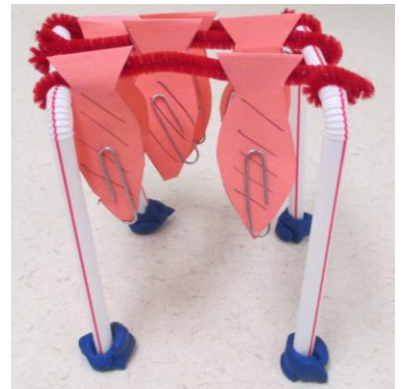
*Hint:* Look at the photos on the information sheet for inspiration!

**Step 2:** Build your fish rack. Use any craft supplies you have available. Be creative!

**Step 3:** Test your fish rack. Cut out fish-shaped pieces of paper and hang them on the fish rack (sliding a paper clip over the “fish” will give it more weight).

- How many fish can your rack hold?
- Are the fish balanced on the poles, or can they easily slip off?
- How easy would it be for a hungry animal to steal fish from the rack?

**Step 4:** Improve your fish rack. Make adjustments to your design, and test it again!



From *Alaska's Wild Salmon*, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, 2005.



[www.lakeandpen.com/residents/about/1p/b/history](http://www.lakeandpen.com/residents/about/1p/b/history)



# Fish Rack Designs

Traditionally, fishing has been the core of subsistence life throughout much of Alaska. People across the state harvest fish when they are available, and then preserve them to last through the winter months. One way to preserve fish is by drying them on **fish racks**, and these racks are an essential feature of many Alaska communities.

There are many ways to design and build a fish rack. Building a good fish rack takes time, experience, and knowledge of the local weather and environment.



*Fish rack on the Noatak River. NPS photo.*



*Fish rack on the  
Seward Peninsula.*

*NPS Photo-Allyce Andrew.*



*Fish rack on the Alaska Peninsula.*

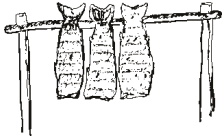
[www.lakeandpen.com](http://www.lakeandpen.com)

## There are many aspects to consider when building a fish rack:

- Fish hung in the open must be protected from seagulls, ravens, and other hungry animals.
- Cut the fish so it can dry quickly by exposing more surface area to the air.
- Make sure the fish are balanced so they don't slip off the poles.
- Sometimes the fish are too slippery to stay on the pole. Spruce poles are rough enough to hold most fish from sliding.
- You can cover the rack with a tarp to protect fish from the rain, or with netting to protect them from insects.

Information from: [www.ankn.uaf.edu/publications/vs/cutting.html](http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/publications/vs/cutting.html)  
[alaska-native-news.com/fish-rack-alutiiq-word-of-the-week-july-26/18423/](http://alaska-native-news.com/fish-rack-alutiiq-word-of-the-week-july-26/18423/)  
[www.nps.gov/noat/learn/historyculture/subsistence-in-noatak.htm](http://www.nps.gov/noat/learn/historyculture/subsistence-in-noatak.htm)  
[www.nps.gov/bela/learn/historyculture/subsistence.htm](http://www.nps.gov/bela/learn/historyculture/subsistence.htm)

Fish Rack Clipart from Alaska Native Knowledge Network: [www.ankn.uaf.edu](http://www.ankn.uaf.edu)



# Fish Rack Examples



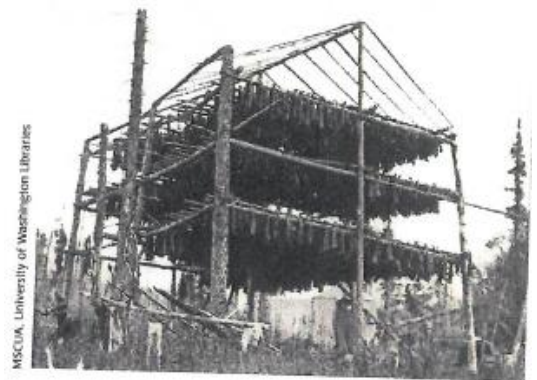
Yup'ik fish rack.

From *Math in a Cultural Context: Lessons Learned from Yup'ik Eskimo Elders*, edited by Jerry Lipka, 2003.



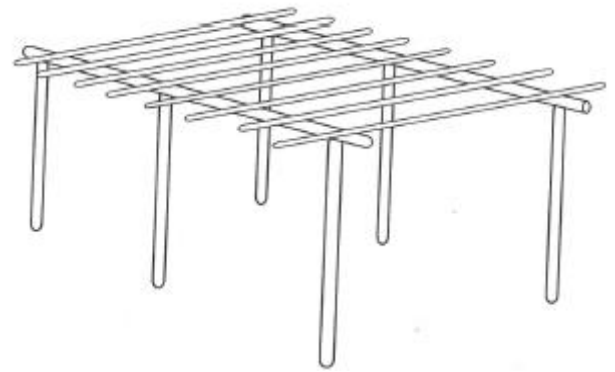
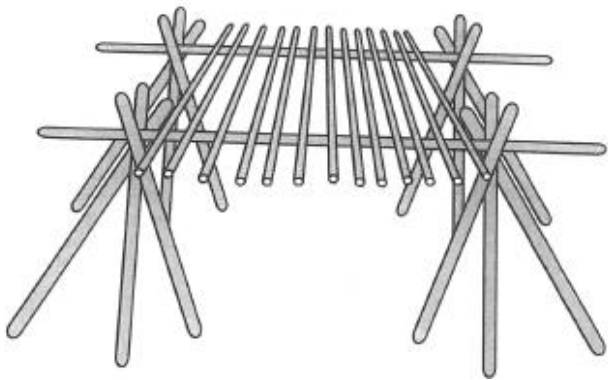
Left: Athabascan fish rack.

From *Math in a Cultural Context: Lessons Learned from Yup'ik Eskimo Elders*, edited by Jerry Lipka, 2003.



Right: Fish rack on the Kenai peninsula, 1890s.

From *Alaska's Wild Salmon*, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, 2005.



Two fish rack designs. From *Math in a Cultural Context: Lessons Learned from Yup'ik Eskimo Elders*, edited by Jerry Lipka, 2003.