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90-Year-Old Russian Professor Convicted Over Hemp 'Fishing Bait'

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Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.

Teach a man to fish with hemp seeds, and you might be criminally convicted.

A Russian court has convicted a 90-year-old philosophy professor on charges of drug possession after planting and drying hemp to use as fishing bait.

Nikolai Ryabov, a professor at Moscow State University of Surveying and Cartography, had planted hemp at his dacha several decades ago to "use it as fishing bait," mixing the plant's seeds with oatmeal. The bushes continued to grow on their own, and last fall, Ryabov again gathered some of the hemp to create fishing bait.

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The Sarayevo district court in the Ryazan region, a three-hour drive from Moscow, handing

him a suspended sentence of three years and eight months with a six-month probationary period for large-scale drug possession.

Ryabov pleaded guilty to the charges and said he never smoked the hemp or used any other drugs. In a press release Tuesday, the court said it took Ryabov's age, profession, status as a World War II veteran and guilty plea into account and made his sentence more moderate.

Ryabov had previously been convicted in 2018 for growing, collecting and storing cannabis on his property.

According to the court's press release, growing hemp wasn't prohibited at the time Ryabov first planted it in his garden decades ago. "It used to grow everywhere and was used for the production of oil and clothes," it said.

But it's illegal now, and that's all that matters.

This story was updated to clarify that Ryabov received a suspended sentence.

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