

Lets Go Fishing!



Finding an early summer pattern for smallmouth can be a challenge. The level of smallmouth activity is dictated by the weather and not the calendar. If we experience consistent weather after spawning, smallmouth will be active and will attack most any artificial or live bait presentation. Mix in a cold front or two and fishing can be tough and frustrate even the most seasoned basser. Since anyone can catch fish when they are biting, let's focus on the tough conditions.

There are years when summer arrives late, food can be limited and smallmouth will be scattered. Minnow hatches are behind schedule and crayfish may not spawn until later in the summer. After spawning, smallmouth might need to do a bit of searching to locate a meal. Anglers, in turn will also need to search to locate smallmouth.

There is no better bait to search for these early summer smallmouth than a crankbait. A crankbait will allow anglers to cover a variety of structure and depths. The best smallmouth crankbait I have ever used is the Yo-Zuri Hardcore SH-60. The crankbait colors are Matte Crayfish, Tiger Craw and Silver Minnow. Once you locate smallmouth with the crankbait, switching over to plastics or even live bait will make for a productive day. It is the combination of presentations and the right location that is the key to success. Keep in mind that when smallmouth are feeding aggressively they will strike a bait from a distance but under adverse conditions, you'll need to put it right in front of them.

In early summer, weeds are the main focal point for all species. With weeds being limited on most rivers, any weed-growth at all can attract a huge concentration of smallmouth. A case in point

was one day last June while a guiding client and I were fishing on the Menominee River. Smallmouth had completed spawning and the fishing had been good for the past two weeks. We were hit with a massive cold front and the water temperature dropped 5 degrees in two days.

We started fishing secondary drop-off's and downed wood near prime spawning areas. With only a few small fish for our efforts, I knew it was time for a change. After heading upstream I moved to the edge of a small creek channel and saw some fresh weeds. I had one of my clients twitch a Yo-Zuri Pin's Minnow over the fresh weeds and he instantly connected with an 18 inch smallmouth. Even though the one guy caught a nice smallmouth on a Pinn's Minnow, I had the other guy cast a wacky rigged jerkbait. The second guy also caught one on the first cast. We continued to catch fish the rest of the day by fishing small creek channels with the dual presentation. The new Yo-Zuri Edge Floating Minnow is ideal for this situation. This bait cuts through the water like a knife allowing you to switch direction on a dime. The edge minnow has a wide wobble, when retrieved at a medium speed, a wobbling roll that really reflects light, and when retrieved slowly it has a tight rolling action that entices strike.

This is a typical early summer pattern; the smallmouth were in the weeds due to the forage. Regardless of the weather or drop in water temperatures, smallmouth still need to eat. A small patch of weeds on the edge of a creek channel can be the only weeds on the river and thus attract large numbers of hungry smallmouth.

In early summer, weeds are sparse and ideal for fishing both crankbaits

and plastics. Smallmouth will also relate to the weeds at all depths. They can cruise the bottom looking for crayfish and roam the tops of the weeds foraging on minnows. This is why it is so critical to fish all levels of the weeds. The ideal scenario is to twitch a crankbait in the weeds, let a wacky rigged jerkbait fall along the weeds and crawl a tube along the bottom. By utilizing these three baits, you won't miss many smallmouth.

Smallmouth are most often associated with deep weeds and weedlines. While this is true in mid summer and fall, in early summer you need to fish shallow weeds. Big smallmouth roam fresh weeds and can be as shallow as three feet. Unlike a river where you are looking for small patches of weeds, on a lake you will need to search large weed flats. On a clear lake you can sight fish for smallmouth cruising shallow weeds; this can be very exciting. However, you need to move slowly with your electric trolling motor while trying not to spook the large smallmouth.

Both shallow running crankbaits and spinnerbaits will find active smallmouth, but I catch most of my smallmouth on minnow style jerkbaits. Rig

the jerkbait weedless and twitch it over the weeds. Use both short, fast snaps and long slow twitches with the jerkbait. Some smallmouth will hit the fast retrieve and some will hit the slow retrieve. Let the jerkbait pause over open areas within the weeds.

The right equipment will make crankbait fishing more effective. If your rod is too light you won't get a good hook-set and you will also be working harder than need be. When fishing crankbaits I prefer a 6' 6" moderate action rod like a Lamiglas XCF 665 or an XC 664. For fishing jerkbaits I prefer a slightly faster action and my choice in rod is a Lamiglas XC 704 or an XPS 703. When fishing crankbaits I prefer fluorocarbon line with my favorite being Yo-Zuri Hybrid in 10 to 12 pound test. When fishing jerkbaits in fresh weeds, I like the line to sink and again prefer fluorocarbon. As the weeds become thicker, you may want to switch to braided line since it floats.

If you are looking for big smallmouth in early summer, find some weeds. This early summer pattern has proven consistent for me year after year. If you give it a try it should also be good to you. For more information go to BigSmallmouthBass.com



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