

Swimbait and Scattered Pre-spawn Smallmouth



Swimbait is always my first choice when searching for pre-spawn smallmouth, but they also are great for northern pike and walleye. My clients tied on Case Lil Magic Swims rigged on 1/8-ounce jigheads. I handed my clients six-foot six medium action Grandt rods spooled with 8-pound Fluorocarbon. InvizX is soft, supple and castable with superior sensitivity. It is virtually invisible with advanced hook-setting power. One rod had an albino shad Case Lil Magic Swimbait, and the other rod had a pearl shiner Case Lil magic swimbait. It is wise when two anglers are casting swimbait to have each angler use a different color until you see a definite pattern.

Even under good river conditions and stable weather pre spawn smallmouth can be scattered, and swimbait is again

the bait of choice. While guiding, I start out the day by having at least one of my clients casting a swimbait. If the bite is slow, I will continue to change baits on one of my client's rods or mine, but someone is always casting a swimbait until we see a pattern.

Stained water can warm quickly but the water temperature also drops after a cool spring night or a cold rain. Any drop in water temperature can cause smallmouth to suspend in the water column or hold tight to the bottom. Swimbait remains productive but you need to get the swimbait in the right place in the water column. This can be done by letting the swimbait drop and retrieving at a different depth each cast or by using larger jigheads.

Swimbait is effective after a cold front even if the water temperature does not rise. I have had countless days when we had to deal with cold front conditions including high winds and overcast skies. These conditions will push smallmouth tight to the bottom and they can refuse to move. If this is the situation, try to keep the swimbait as close to the bottom as possible. Use a slow retrieve just fast enough to keep the paddle tail moving. Try not to pause the retrieve. Smallmouth can follow the swimbait and if you pause your retrieve they will turn and move away. You will also have a good chance of getting snagged.

There is no one size fits all when fishing with swimbait. It is a good practice to downsize your swimbait under tough conditions from the start. Why waste time using a larger swimbait when you know that the bite is tough? After a cold front I will start out fishing with a shorter, slender paddle tail. Although you are using a shorter swimbait continue to use a longer shank on your jighead. When smallmouth are sluggish it will take a few more seconds to roll the swimbait and the longer shank hook on the jighead will result in more hook ups.

Your choice in jighead will also determine your success rate. Avoid cheap jigheads with short shank hooks. Besides having a longer shank, the jighead should have a quality super sharp hook and gripping power to keep your swimbait pinned so as not to tear or shorten the life of your swimbait. After you catch a smallmouth if the swimbait is loose on the jighead it will impair the action of the swimbait resulting in less fish being caught. Even a short strike by a finicky smallmouth will pull the swimbait off the shank just enough to make a difference. In 2020 and 2021 I had excellent results using Deathgrip Jigheads with all my swimbait. I have never used a jighead that is as effective as Deathgrip Jigheads. These jigheads will give your swimbait the longest possible life.

Pre-spawn River Smallmouth Swimbait

