

A Pro's Tricks for the Walleye Opener

by Gord Ellis for Wilderness North
(March 15, 2006)



I know, it's a few months away and all, but it's never too early to think about the walleye opener. As walleye fishing days go, very few create as much excitement right here at Wilderness North as the opening of the season. Yet as anyone who's fished more than a couple openers will tell you, it's not always fun and games. Snow, high water, rain and brutal heat are all possible in Northwest Ontario on the opening day. Sometimes all on the SAME day! This can make the walleye bite tricky. And really, who wants to get skunked during the opener?

So here are eight "pro" walleye fishing tricks that might give you a leg up on the spiny ones this spring.

- 1) Adjust your Jig** - Many lead head jigs gain a little extra bite by turning the point of the hook up. A wider hook gap means the barb can more easily stick into the walleyes' bony mouth. Some anglers will also give the hook a light offset. A pair of needle nose pliers will do both these jobs with ease.
- 2) Add a Rattle** - Every year I use rattle baits more, and the new rattle jig collars that are on the market can turn any plain jig into a rattle jig. In windy conditions, or in dark or muddy water, a rattle jig will definitely help put more fish in the boat. If you like to troll crankbaits, stock up on some of the rattlin' models that are out there.
- 3) Try a White Spinner Blade** - Most Canadian walleye anglers use flame red or chartreuse spinner blades on their Little Joe spinners. These colours have certainly put quite a few fish in the boat over the years. But in the western provinces and Dakotas, white blades have proven to be a real walleye killer in clear and murky water. Many of the favourite prey species for walleye are white in colour. Can't hurt to try them if the spinner bite goes dead.
- 4) Drift with the Wind** - There are a lot of gas motors grinding away on opening morning, and after a time this will put shallow fish down. If the wind is blowing at a speed less than about 2 miles per hour, try drifting over your favourite spot. Pitch a jig and minnow to shore or try dragging a live bait rig. It's amazing what a difference the quiet approach can make. An electric trolling motor will help you keep the boat in position, if that's an option.

5) Troll Crankbaits - With many lakes already seeing water temperatures in the double digits, you can be sure that the whopper walleye will be looking for large forage. Minnow bodied crankbaits like the Rapala Husky Jerk, Rattlin' Rogue or the Bagley Bang O are often just the kind of mouthful that the biggest fish in the swim are tuned into. Use a one-quarter ounce rubber core, or a half-ounce bottom bouncer and keep the lure a foot or two off the bottom.



6) Fish the Windy Shore - This is a general rule in many fishing situations, and it certainly holds true for spring walleye. Wind activates walleye by blowing in warm surface water, stirring up shoreline areas, obscuring sunlight and disorienting baitfish. A windy warm front is the perfect spring scenario. The longer the wind blows on a shoreline, the better. However, if the wind is cold, you might have to get out of the wind to find active fish. Walleye will also bask in shallow bays where the sun warms the bottom.

7) Use a Long Leader- Lindy Rigs and other live bait presentations are an excellent choice for spring walleye fishing. But the packaged leaders that some anglers use are often no more than three feet in length. While this is okay for many shallow water situations, finicky walleye will turn a wet nose up at a bait that's running too close to a sinker. If this is happening to you, try a five, six or even eight-foot leader. That small adjustment alone can make a big difference in the number of bites you get.

8) Try a Tube Jig - Seems radical, I know. Yet I've caught more trophy walleye on tube jigs than on anything else. A 4-inch tube on a half-ounce head is about right. White, brown, black and blue tubes are the best for walleye. Cast the thing out then hop and drag it back across the bottom. If a fish takes it, you'll know 'cause they'll slam them.

Good fishing.

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