

What Do Bass Eat?

What we need to use to catch them

Bass will eat just about anything. They feed on most every organism that swims or lives in the water or on the surface, as long as they can get it into their mouth! They eat dragon fly larva, damselfly larva, hellgrammites, any minnow species, the spawn of any other game fish (including their own!), leeches, crawfish, young turtles, frogs, snakes, you name it they will try and eat it! So in any given body of water we need to know as much as we can about what kind of forage is present and have a variety of lures to imitate this forage. Bass are opportunistic feeders which means they are less likely to focus in on one type of forage and ignore other potential meals, although they do on occasion become selective. Bass are also like to attack and or eat any moving objects that approach their “nesting beds” during the spawn when they are guarding their eggs.

To illustrate how little the Bass discriminates, I would like to give you an example of how strange this can get. When and where I learned how to fish for bass was in my youth, 1950's, in the midwest. At that time there was an extremely effective surface plug that was in everyone's tackle box. I caught my first bass in a patch of lilly pads on this plug. It looked nothing like any organism in the water, or for that matter, on land or in the air. It was originally sold under the trademark name “basserino”. It is still sold today under various names. It has a “popper” head, and oblong body. It has two sets of treble hooks and the front third of the plug is fire engine red and the other two thirds is white! It came in about six different sizes. And it took bass! In all honesty I have always speculated that it just ticked them off and they went for it.

My point here is that whether you are a live bait fisherman, a fly fisher, or you fish lures, you need to have a range of baits in different types, sizes, colors, etc. to use on the water (see articles on how to use specific techniques and lures). As the day goes by the conditions in and out of the water will change. These include: water temperature, wind, barometric pressure, sunlight vs. varying levels of cloud cover, as well as the activity levels of forage. For example, take crawfish for instance. In the same lake the crawfish may not be moving out in the open in the first few hours of morning, But later on they

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may be scurrying about and the bass begin to pick up on them. You would want to switch and go to a crawfish imitation. Likewise the crawfish in the weeds (their favorite place) will be more olive color, while the crawfish that are in the rocks along a dam will be brown. So you would want to change lure color in that case. The type of lure that works in the first two hours of the day may change, and later in the day change again. As the light changes due to cloud cover, or if the clouds clear and you have a blue-bird day, regardless of what lure color you may have been using, you would want to change it as the light changes. Rule of thumb is as it gets lighter, lure color goes lighter. As it gets darker, lure color goes darker. Black is excellent at night.

For a variety of reasons, light, temperature barometric pressure will cause bass to shift from what is called an “active” state to an “inactive state”. In truth we don’t really understand what all can cause this shift, Maybe just “Old Bucket Mouths” mood! In a chain of lakes like our Sunnyside lakes, bass might be active in one lake but inactive in the next on any given day. This shift can go back and forth during a day or last for several days to weeks. When this happens, to continue to catch bass, we have to shift tactics, lure size, lure type, and especially the speed of our retrieve. For example when fishing any lure to inactive bass, smaller size and SLOWER movement and retrieve are required. If you have been fishing stick baits or crank baits, when bass move to an inactive state you may wish to change to plastic baits, ie. plastic worms, plastic crawfish, or plastic lizards, and work them SLOWLY. Imagine your trying to lightly bump the bass on the nose! In an “inactive” state a bass won’t travel very far at all to grab a lure. When active, a bass will zoom twenty feet to nail a spinner bait with twin colorado blades, or a “rattlin’ crank bait!

Ely Area Lake Forage

Our local lakes contain primarily crawfish, spawn of gamefish (bass, pike, etc.), leeches, dragonfly nymphs, damselfly nymphs and some other large insects. They do not have populations of bait fish shiner, fathead, mud minnows, shad or an abundant population of dace or frogs. Nevertheless, spinner baits, stick baits, crank baits, shad imitations, and surface lures work very well, as do spoons, mepps/rooster tail type baits, and the full line of plastics. For bait fishermen, there are several options. We can’t use live bait

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that does not come from our lakes waters. We don't have minnows. Night crawlers are good for bass - just use the entire worm, not just a piece. Dragonfly nymphs can be caught in the reeds along the shoreline and kept in a minnow bucket. Crawfish can also be trapped and used for bait.

Lake Structure

With exception of the Comins north lake, all of our area lakes are "pond" lakes. This classification refers to the physical structure and environment of our lakes. The strategies and styles of fishing our lakes need to be adjusted accordingly. Our lakes vary little in depth, are shallow and are lacking the degree of structural elements present in other lakes. We do not have "drop-offs" from shallow to 25-30ft. depths. We don't have "points" to fish or "suspended" fish. There is no "timber" to fish, "riprap" or creek mouths either. However, we do have structure and even though it may be "micro" compared to natural lakes or large western reservoirs, bass are responsive to these small variations and taking them into consideration will be productive. A under water spring on the bottom, an original creek channel that may only have a 2-3ft. depth change can be holding places for bass and should be fished well. The large weed beds that grow as clumps in our lakes or channels between weed beds are excellent areas to run baits along the edges. In the mid summer months when weed growth is abundant (and accursed!) drop-shoting plastic worms, crawfish, or lizards through the weeds to the bottom can produce some of the biggest bass. Keep in mind that the weeds are like trees, thick and massive on top, but underneath, like tree trunks in a forest there is plenty of space - space that bass love. We just need to get down there and wiggle something in front of their nose! Our lakes are also surrounded by another type of valuable structure - reeds. There are abundant reeds along our shores with holes and channels in them. Bass hold in these areas, especially when it is a calm "glassed-out" day. A common perception among bass fishermen is that on these calm days bass hold close to the reeds. They do, and they also move all the way into the reed stands. Don't hesitate to take your boat into these holes and channels. Drop-shoting and jigging can be very effective.

Tight Lines!, Bodhi