

Fast Relief for Walleye Fever

By Jim Barta

It's no secret in the world of sport fishing that there are few guarantees. Throughout the month of April and early weeks of May, however, anglers can get as close to a guaranteed successful day of walleye fishing as can be expected. April's arrival signals the beginning of an armada of boats with anglers catching some of the millions of walleyes using the Detroit River for travel to and from spawning areas.

According to the Michigan DNR officials I have talked to recently from mid-March through the months of April and May approximately 10 to 12 million walleyes travel through the Detroit River in search of areas to spawn.

Only in recent years has walleye fishing received the notoriety that was once reserved for bass fishing and its organizations. Walleyes vied with carp, catfish and Rodney Dangerfield in receiving no respect.

Times have certainly changed! With what is arguably the best season of the year for catching walleyes upon us, I'll share some techniques and tips that I've picked up during the past 40 years of fishing the Detroit River. Remember that no fishing technique is carved in stone. Anglers may choose to fine tune particular areas that are needed to meet conditions like weather, water clarity, available equipment, etc.

One of the hottest techniques used on the river to consistently produce an angler's daily limit of spring walleyes is vertical jigging. Unlike handline trolling, where only two people can participate at a time, jig fishing allows several anglers to enjoy the camaraderie of fishing together from the same boat.

Tackle used for vertical jigging should be the best quality equipment you can afford. The ideal rod for my personal use is one that is medium weight, 5 ½ to 6 feet long and has a fast action.

Most reputable manufacturers are producing reels that are mid-range in price and work great while fishing with jigs. I believe companies may manufacture high priced reels to maintain the "status" as a quality reel manufacturer and offer a product available to individuals with "upper end wallets".

Now there is the debate between using monofilament and using one of the new braided super lines. I recommend using a name brand monofilament. An advantage normally attributed to the braided super line is the lack of stretch. In most situations where an angler is vertical jigging for walleyes, the water's depth is rarely over 30 feet. In that distance the stretch in monofilament will be too slight to detect. Another advantage to using monofilament is the angler's ability to break the line if his jig is snagged in rocks and other structure. Braided super lines are almost impossible to break by hand and anglers can lose a lot of expensive line before accessing a knife to cut the snag free.

My favorite size and style jig to use while vertical jigging in the Detroit River is a 5/8" to ¾ oz. round head jig. Personal preferences and previous success will often dictate which color anglers use. During the first three weeks of April my best success comes on jigs painted orange and chartreuse. About 90 percent of the cones in a walleye's eyes sense the red, orange, yellow portion of the color spectrum. Scientists therefore presume that walleyes see red-orange, orange, and yellow-orange as bright colors. I add a plastic grub for bulk and tip the jig with a minnow to add taste and scent to my offering.

In the third week of April as the water temperatures hit 50 degrees, I put all my colored jigs away and begin using unpainted ones. I tip these jigs with a rather unassuming 3 inch brown plastic worm and stinger hook. In late April as the walleyes begin to feed on larvae, crayfish and other bottom dwellers, this plain lead jig and plastic worm combo accounts for most of my daily limits!.

Jig fishing can be learned through determination, lots of practice and a good dose of patience. Over the years I have discovered there are few things that I enjoy more than catching Detroit River walleyes while vertical jigging with light tackle.

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