

# Perch time!!

By Dave Dilks

Perch provide a nice alternative to walleyes early in the season before the walleye bite takes off or when the boat traffic in the walleye areas gets too crazy. They also taste pretty good, too.

The best time to go is as soon in the season as you can get your boat out. The perch are already here, so it's just a question of when the ice clears up enough to allow you to get out safely. The other major factor in terms of timing is having clear water. Strong east or northeast winds or heavy rain will muddy up the water for a couple of days. You're better off waiting for the water to clear than to fish muddy water.

Lots of areas hold perch in the spring. My favorites are the area below the cross-dike by Sugar Island, the horseshoe at the head of Boblo Island, and the waters of Lake Erie about a mile and a quarter south of the Colchester harbor in 28-32' of water. Note that the last two areas are in Canadian water and require an Ontario fishing license. The cross-dike area straddles the border, and there are good areas both in Michigan and Ontario water. Regardless of where you fish, don't be afraid to move around until you start catching fish. One advantage of the cross-dike is that is the water sometimes stays clean for an extra day after the rest of the river and the lake have been muddied up by wind or rain.

Depending on the day or the location, any one of four different techniques can be the ticket for catching perch. All of these rigs rely on shiner minnows as bait. 1) The most popular method is the spreader rig. This is the one rig that can be fished anywhere, and is the go-to rig when fishing in areas with some kind of current, such as at the horseshoe. Regarding equipment, it helps to have a limber rod to feel the light biters. It's hard to beat the Eagle Claw Feather Light series of rods, even better when coupled with Fireline on your reel. You can fish a spreader right over the side of your boat, although it is usually better to cast away from the boat, reel up the slack, wait a minute, then s-l-o-w-l-y start reeling the rig back in. Some days, the perch want the bait laying flat on the bottom with no movement at all. If you're going to fish spreaders a lot, it also helps to tie your own rigs. This will allow you to make rigs with different lengths between your bottom hook and the sinkers. Use fairly heavy line if you tie your own; light line tends to kink too easily. When fishing rocky areas (horseshoe, Colchester), having the lower hook hang even with the sinker is best. When fishing areas with weeds on the bottom (cross-dike), it helps if your lower hook rides a foot or so above your sinker to keep your hook from tangling in the weeds. 2) The second option is the slip bobber. This rig consists of a sliding bobber, a bobber stop on your line, and either a teardrop or plain hook (plus some split shot) at the end of your line. It requires fairly shallow water and little current, which makes it well suited for the cross-dike area. Set your bobber stop at a depth where your minnow will ride just above the weeds/bottom, cast it out, and keep an eye on the bobber. Expect to hook up with a good number of northern pike this way, too, even if most of them are small. 3) Jigging spoons. Jigging spoons are a big fish bait that can be used anywhere that there isn't much current (Lake Erie, cross-dike). Luhr Jensen's Crippled Herring is one of my favorites, although there are tons of other options such as the Swedish Pimple. Size of the spoon depends upon the depth of water; a  $\frac{3}{4}$  oz. spoon is best out in the lake, while a  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz. spoon will work in shallower areas such as the cross-dike. Tip the hook of the spoon with the head of a large minnow or a whole small minnow, lower it down until it reaches bottom, than raise it a few inches off the bottom. Once every few minutes you can jerk your rod up a couple of feet, then let the spoon settle back down to just above the bottom. Color sometimes makes a difference; chartreuse and pearl are good colors to start with. 4) Slip sinker rig. When the fish have quit biting everything else, you can still keep them biting with a slip sinker rig, although it takes a sensitive rod and a lot of practice. The rig is simple: an egg sinker, a barrel swivel,

and a 12-18" leader to an Aberdeen hook. Hook a lively minnow just above the tail, lower the sinker down to near the bottom, and concentrate on your rod tip. When the fish get fussy, they'll barely mouth the minnow, and you'll only see the slightest movement in the rod tip. With some practice, you'll be able to tell just how long to wait until they have the whole minnow in their mouth before setting the hook. Expect some frustration in the beginning as you set the hook too early and pull up a bare hook while the perch swims off with your minnow.

See You On The Water!!