

# BASS *in the* GRASS

## Probe those dense weed patches for bigger catches

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

Nothing looks more like home to a big bass than a thick weed patch. Grass provides everything a bass needs including food, cover and oxygen. Not known for their speed, bass use their excellent green and black camouflage to hide in thick grass where they can ambush prey.

Practically every south Alabama bass honey hole grows thick with weeds. As temperatures rise, grass mats grow even more solid until chilly temperatures hit in the fall. To yank lunkers from their vegetative lairs, south Alabama anglers need to learn how to go over or through grass.

Few lures can run over the tops of matted grass better than a buzz frog. Rigged with a hook inserted into the soft-plastic body, a buzzing frog sputters over entangling cover with ease. Bass often explode up through the cover to attack a frog, engulfing hunks of grass and all.

"I rig a frog just like I would a Texas-rigged worm," advised Shaw Grigsby, a professional angler. "I use a screw-lock hook to secure the hook to the head of the bait and thrust the hook point into the body. My favorite way is to throw it out weightless and reel it back across the surface. Even on a steady retrieve, I twitch it a bit just to give it a little different sound."

### Frogs sink or swim

Some frogs float and others sink. Anglers can pull either one across mat tops. With their kicking legs, buzzing frogs resemble natural prey. Anglers can also pause occasionally to let floating frogs sit on the surface for a few moments or allow sinking frogs to descent a foot or two into open pockets.

Buzzing frogs create considerable surface commotion, but sometimes, bass want more subtle baits, especially on a calm morning. During those times, throw a weightless soft-plastic jerkshad, lizard, fluke or similar creature. Some very light baits might require a little extra casting heft, especially on windy days, so attach a split-shot to the line. Use just enough weight to improve casting range.



Photo by John N. Felsher

An angler lands a bass that hit a jig fished in thick grassy cover.

Rig baits with hooks inserted into the plastic, just like on a frog. Some shad baits even come with belly slots where people can insert hooks.

"In thick matted grass, nothing works better than a weightless soft-plastic jerkbait," explained Terry Segraves, a professional bass angler. "I use it Texas-rigged with a 4/0 or 5/0 hook so it's weedless. I work it over the grass tops just like a topwater bait. It's unbelievable some of the explosions we see. Bass just come after them right up through the grass. That's pretty exciting."

Anglers can work these slithering baits similar to a buzzing frog over the surface or with a "plop and drop" method. Move the bait a few feet with the rod. Use the reel only to pick up slack line. Move the bait in short spurts, flicking it from clump to clump. At pockets of open water, let the bait sink a foot or two before resuming the retrieve. Bass frequently slurp such baits as they sink.

Spinnerbaits and buzzbaits can also entice bass in the grass. A perennial spring favor for tempting bass in the

shallow bays and marshes of the lower Mobile-Tensaw Delta, a Snagless Sally in-line spinnerbait can slip through most types of cover. Buzzbaits climb to the surface and sputter over the grass tops. Long, slender willow-leaf blades cut through grass better than other blade types, but even these baits cannot plow through thick mats. Run them parallel to grassy edges or through broken patches.

When the subtle approach fails, take more drastic action to attract a fish's attention. If bass hunker down in the thickest cover, anglers might need to almost knock them on the head to make them bite. People can flip jigs tipped with plastic trailers at close range to target tiny pockets or specific grass clumps.

In really dense canopies, punch through the roof with a heavy jig. In especially impenetrable weeds, throw the jig straight up in the air so that it impacts like a meteor smashing through the surface. That sudden invasion of its lair frequently provokes vicious reaction strikes, almost as if the bass attacked in self-defense.