

# Falling temperatures, RISING ACTION

*As waters cool, bass turn more vicious*

BY JOHN N. FELSHER

As leaves begin to change colors and the air gives off a hint of cooler weather to come, many sportsmen put away their fishing rods to pick up guns and bows. On a cool fall day, anglers might find themselves alone at their favorite honey holes during one of the best times to catch bass.

As winter approaches, bass fatten up by gorging themselves on high-protein shad. Therefore, baits that mimic shad often produce the best results in the fall. Crankbaits closely resemble shad. The more erratic they run, the better bass like it.

"Very seldom do I just steadily retrieve a crankbait," advised Gerald Swindle, an Alabama bass pro. "I don't jerk a crankbait unless I'm trying to clear the grass. The stop-and-go retrieve is probably the most effective way to retrieve a crankbait. I make a few turns on the reel and stop for a few moments. Then, I start winding again."

Topwaters also work very well in the fall, especially when schooling bass chase shad toward the surface. Cooling air creates comfortable water temperatures so bass remain more active throughout the day in the fall. Bass frequently roam the shallows searching for shad, bluegills and other prey they can devour. Many anglers throw walking baits that move with a zigzag cadence to simulate a wounded baitfish.

Jerkbaits fill a niche between topwaters and crankbaits. Some float and some suspend or slowly sink. With short lips, floating jerkbaits dive a few feet and then pop back up to the surface, great for fishing shallow flats like in the lower Mobile-Tensaw Delta. When fishing floating jerkbaits, pop the rod to make the lure gurggle on the surface before diving. Then, pause the



Photo by John N. Felsher

Davis Whitten shows off a bass he caught while fishing a walking topwater bait. Bass feed heavily on shad in the fall and topwater baits resemble shad.

retrieve. Anglers can also reel jerkbaits slowly and steadily so the lip creates an erratic, wobbling action just below the surface.

"Jerkbaits are extremely versatile lures that can be fished in many different situations," explained Randy Howell, a former Bassmaster Classic champion from Alabama. "Jerkbaits are very good for targeting non-active

fish and provoking reaction strikes. I use them in the fall when the water starts to cool and fish start chasing baitfish, but they are effective all year long."

Slow sinking or suspending jerkbaits look almost identical to floaters, but feel a bit heavier. These baits often

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