



Fall Wild Trout

by John Allen

photos by the author

Oranges, yellows and reds, just as radiant as the leaves in the surrounding landscape, become ever more glowing on wild trout as they enter the fall months. Most wild brook trout and brown trout will take on colors unmatched by any other freshwater fish. Their sheer beauty alone will keep you coming back for more. In addition to their appearance, this time of year is also one of the most aggressive feeding periods for trout. You will see trout that you never knew existed suddenly show up ready to feed on whatever they can find. I have also found this time of year to be the absolute best chance to catch your largest wild trout. To be successful during this time of the year on wild trout you need to know what bait and tackle to use and have good timing.

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Bait and tackle

For the angler who targets wild trout on a regular basis, they will notice only a slight difference in the feeding patterns of wild trout from the spring to fall. Anglers who target bigger fish by using larger baits will notice the biggest difference. The reason for using larger baits is two-fold. This is the time of the year when the minnows are at their largest size. There are not very many small minnows in the water. During this time of the year, trout are also feeding heavily for the winter. This will typically lead to more trout feeding, so the amount of trout caught will probably be higher if you approach them correctly. You should always approach wild trout in the opposite direction of the stream flow since the trout will more times than not be facing upstream. Even with this approach, you want to keep a low profile, make casts of at least 20 feet if the stream allows, wear darker clothing and stay as close to the stream bank as possible, so the surroundings can break up your outline.

A fly angler who likes to use larger streamers will find a lot more trout willing to chase after and inhale a large meal. This can be said for both the always-aggressive mountain freestone trout as well as the classic limestone trout. However, do not discount dry flies and classic wet flies for mountain freestone trout, as they will be more than effective through most of the fall. If you want to target larger trout, you will increase your chances of hooking them by bypassing the smaller flies that will entice about every other trout in the stream.

For spinner anglers, your lures won't change at all as your typical inline spinner will still be the ticket. However, if you like to use plugs, this will be the time to go from 1- or 2-inch baits to 3-inch baits. As with other types of fishing,



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the angler should entice a few more strikes to find bigger trout in the feeding areas. Based on my personal experience of fishing the same stretch of stream at different times of the year, it is truly amazing that one day I cannot get a trout over 10 inches. Then, in the fall, I find myself landing several between 14 and 17 inches.

Bait anglers will have success on many of the same baits that they did in the spring and summer. However, they will find that larger minnows, such as larger-sized black nose dace, will be even more effective during this time of the year. This is the perfect time to hook onto a big pre-spawn wild brown looking for an easy meal in the way of the big dace drifting down the stream.



Timing

Timing is everything when targeting wild trout in the fall, the earlier in the season the better. If you go too early, the colors on the trout may not be quite as brilliant as they will be in middle of October. If you wait too long, you will run into the leaf hatch. When you hit the season just right,

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you will find yourself there for the sheer beauty of the trout as much as chasing after the bigger trout. Around mid-October, you will find the trout starting to pair off as they prepare to spawn. You can still catch a decent amount once they pair off, but you will have to work for them. When spawning starts, it will become even more difficult to entice the trout. You will probably find yourself catching a few, but these trout are too occupied with spawning to worry about eating.

Once you've begun to notice that the trout are spawning, do your best to stay out of the water and only fish from the banks. Going into the water could destroy a bed that you didn't notice when stepping into the water. In a seemingly natural deterrent, the spawning period also tends to be the peak time of year for leaves to fall into the stream causing you to get hooked in them on a regular basis. During this time of the year, I will typically take a break from wild trout fishing to let the trout do their thing. I usually won't go back



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for them until at least Christmas, because the most visible trout immediately after the spawn will be the ones guarding their bed. I would rather give the eggs their best chance of survival than risk having predators go after the eggs while I'm landing fish. The less stress you can put on them during and immediately after the spawn the better.

This fall if you want to witness some of the most beautiful fish Pennsylvania has to offer at their peak beauty, take a shot at wild trout fishing. There isn't much that is more breathtaking than the vibrant colors of both wild trout and fall foliage. ☐