

Live Bait TECHNIQUES FOR EARLY SEASON TROUT

by Jeff Woleslagle

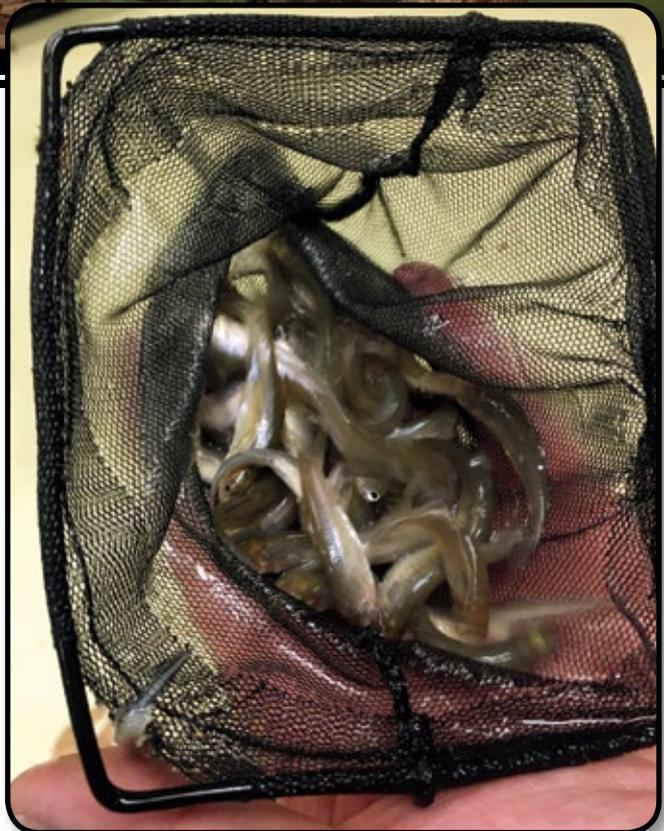
photos by the author



As I eased along the bank, I patiently waited for the two anglers in front of me to slide up stream to the next hole. I had no concern about fishing behind them as I was certain there were still plenty of fish to be had. I watched them cover the water efficiently with their spinners but neither was rewarded with a strike. After they moved on, I made a long cast to the head of the pool and let my waxworms drift and tumble into the deepest stretch. On my second drift, I saw my line twitch and immediately set the hook into a feisty Brown Trout. The fish made two strong runs around the hole before I eased it along the bank and reached down with my hemostats to twist the hook free without ever removing it from the water. I caught three more trout from that hole and missed one other strike before moving on. By the time I got back to the truck, I had landed 18 trout and lost six others, despite the heavy fishing pressure during this first week of the season.

Although I enjoy using the fly rod as well as casting hardware with a spinning rod for trout, live bait will consistently put early season fish on the end of your line. To be successful, an angler should consider which live bait to use in different situations and how best to present that bait.

The prime time to consider red worms and small earthworms is after a rain event when the water is high and slightly off-color. During this time, worms are being washed



Lively minnows often get the attention of Brook Trout and Brown Trout.



Waxworms and small earthworms can be highly effective baits for early season trout.

The author with an early season Brook Trout that took a pair of waxworms.

naturally into the stream with early spring rains, and it doesn't take long for newly stocked fish to acquire a taste for them. As with any bait, when fishing for trout, the key to drawing a strike is a natural drift. To get a natural drift, I recommend light line and minimum weight. Monofilament or fluorocarbon line in 2- to 6-pound-test is a good choice. For some live bait applications, I prefer monofilament line as it is more buoyant than fluorocarbon line. When fishing earthworms, I like to hook them through the head rather than through the middle or thread them on the hook. Although it is easier for a fish to strip the bait when hooked in this manner, it looks incredibly natural in the water and will draw more strikes. I normally use a size 10 baitholder or octopus hook, and I start out with no weight at all. If the weight of the worm isn't enough to keep my drifts in the strike zone, I'll add one or two BB-size splitshot about 15- to 20-inches up the line.

My favorite live bait is the waxworm. They are the larval stage of the wax moth and resemble many natural forage insect larvae that end up in any stream. When presented on a good drift, they will almost always produce. To fish them, I like to impale two waxworms on a size 16 treble hook with a single BB-size splitshot about 20 inches above the hook. I have probably caught more trophy-class early season trout on waxworms than any other live bait. Unless you plan on taking

some fish home for the table, be sure to set the hook at the slightest indication of a strike. It is easy to hook fish deeply when using this technique.

Butterworms are like the waxworm's larger brother, and they can be highly effective. They are the larval stage of the Chilean moth and are a larger and meatier offering than waxworms. I have seen days when they will outperform just about anything else. I fish butterworms in much the same way that I fish waxworms. Often, I use a size 8 or 10 baitholder or octopus hook instead of a small treble hook.

Mealworms also resemble a natural forage item for stream trout and can be a good early season bait. They are hardy and easy to keep alive. Take a size 12 baitholder hook and run the shaft through the body. Only the eye of the hook sticks out near the head of the worm with the curve and point of the hook exposed about midway on the worm's body. When this offering is presented on a natural drift, it is hard for trout to resist.

Minnows can be a terrific early season bait as well. If a stream is stocked with Brook Trout and Brown Trout, I love to tempt them with lively minnows. They are available at most bait and tackle stores, and I prefer them in the 1½- to 2-inch size range. Hook them through the lips on a size 10 baitholder hook, and use just enough small splitshot to keep them in the middle of the water column.

Earthworms, waxworms, mealworms, butterworms and minnows are all great choices to hit the stream with this spring. There are many ways to pursue early season trout, and live bait can be a sure bet to finding success. □