



by John Allen *photos by the author*

Every angler has their own “secret” bait. In the last few years, I have come to realize that for many the “secret” is out. Anglers are discovering just how productive soft plastic baits can be for trout. They have been a key lure for bass and panfish anglers over the years, why not trout? Many lure manufacturers have identified this increasing trend and are now producing soft plastics specifically for trout. When it comes to fishing with soft plastic baits for trout, anglers need to be able to identify which baits to use and how to use them.

Baits

There are many different types of soft plastic baits hitting the market. It can be tough to determine which ones to try. I select my baits based on the type of action they will produce and how close they are to something that naturally occurs in or around a trout stream. Not to say that imitations and other baits will not work, but I feel that something with a lot of movement that closely mimics something that a trout has seen before will produce much better results. I have found minnow, grub and worm imitations to be the most productive baits. When you are picking out baits, also look at the ones designed for panfish. A lot of these baits can be as productive as the trout-specific baits.

Soft plastic baits can provide the type of action that hard plastic, metal or live baits cannot provide. I would compare the action to a streamer fly with a marabou tail. You are in control to dictate how and when the bait moves through the water. As you spark the trout’s interest, you can make it move at just the right time to create an instinctive strike.

Tackle

When rigging soft plastic baits, you have to account for the depth and speed of the stream you are fishing and the size of the bait. Jig heads between $\frac{1}{16}$ - and $\frac{1}{64}$ -ounce are perfect for trout-sized soft plastic baits. However, you can also get a completely different action from the bait with a splitshot rig. There is also the option of a weightless rig, but I would only recommend this if the bait can sink naturally. Otherwise, you will struggle to even be able to cast the bait. Switching up the rig as the day goes on allows me to go after those tougher bites.

When selecting a rod and line, go light on both fronts in order to get maximum casting distance. I use an ultra-light 6-foot rod with 4-pound-test line. The longer the better, but make sure that the rod is light enough to cast the $\frac{1}{64}$ -ounce baits.



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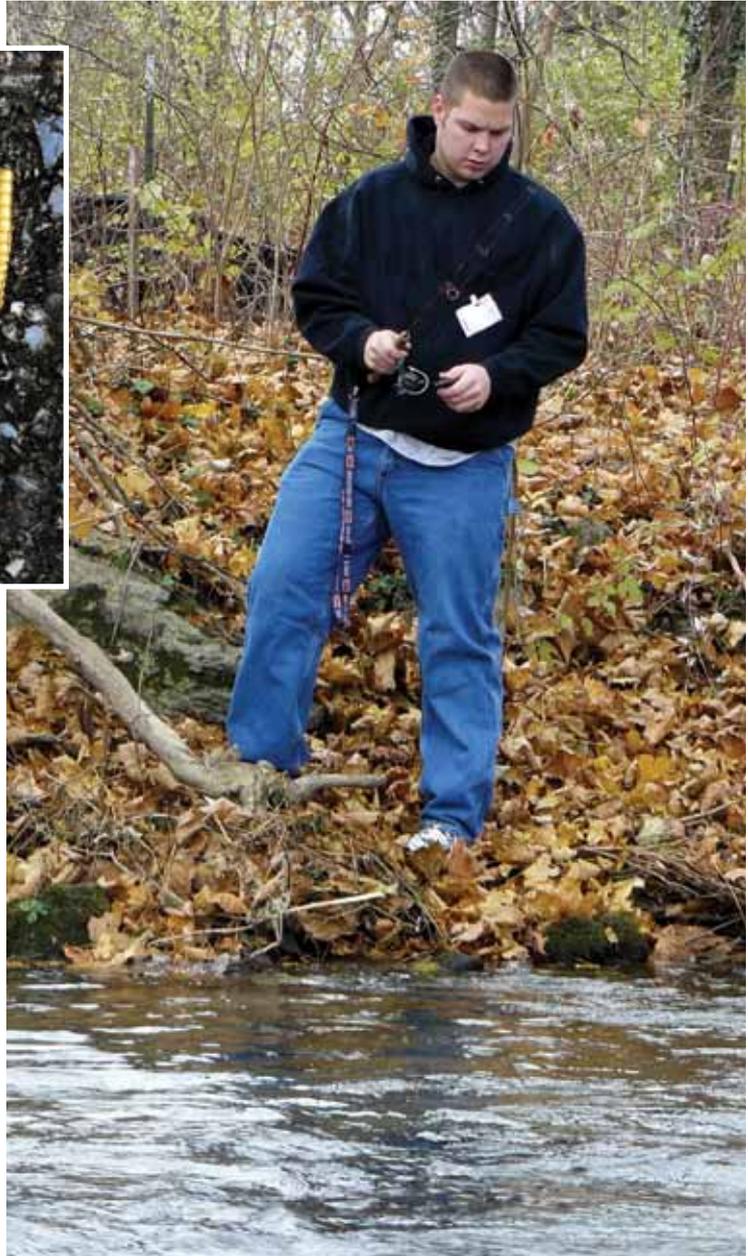
Techniques

When sight fishing for trout, you will want to cast a few feet upstream of the trout. The distance will depend on the weight of the bait you are using and the speed of the water. Allow the bait to sink through the water column as it approaches the trout. Once the bait hits the bottom and is within 1 or 2 feet of the trout, jig the rod tip straight up and down a few inches to make the bait bounce. If the trout seems interested on the initial twitch, give it another bounce at a different speed to try to seal the deal. If the trout does not seem interested on the first cast, cast again and try a more aggressive retrieve. Try a sideways twitch, in which you make a short, quick twitch as you pull the bait away from the trout. If the trout begins to chase the bait and does not take it on the aggressive movements, let the bait settle to the bottom and try an up and down twitch.

If you are unable to see the trout, try to find a good run and use the same techniques as if you were sight fishing. This time you will find yourself in more of a rhythm with your jigging and twitching as the bait drifts through the run, rather than waiting to see how the trout is reacting to the bait. With each cast, switch up the speed of your jigging and twitching in order to catch both the sluggish and aggressive trout in a hole.

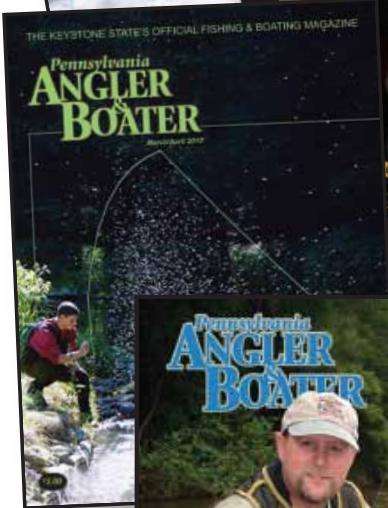
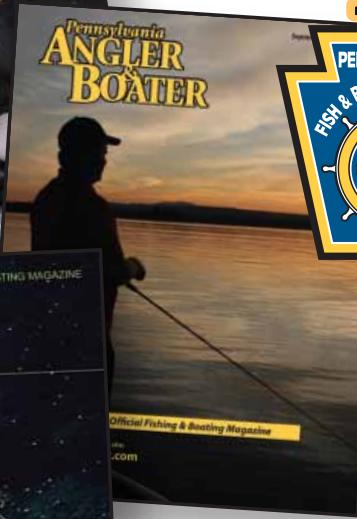
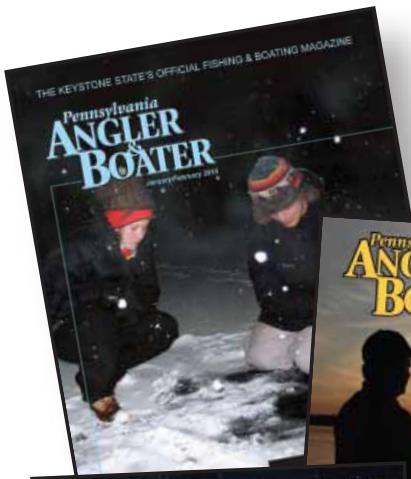
With the “secret” of soft plastic baits for trout out in the open, many anglers are giving this technique a try and are surprised at how productive the technique is for them. ☐

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