

Autumn Bass Opportunities

by Chris Gorsuch photos by the author

The cooling temperatures and shorter days of autumn bring about changes in nature unlike any other time of year. Nearly every living creature is triggered by this change in climate and daylight. For most, it triggers a time of heavy feeding. For others, it's a time of gathering in larger groups. It can also be a time for migration. For river Smallmouth Bass, it's time for all three.

The three months of autumn provide opportunities for Smallmouth Bass like no other time of the year. Experiencing this first hand has been an eye-opener for me over the last two decades. Smallmouth Bass are already fierce feeders, just ask any bass angler about how aggressive they are in taking all types of lure presentations throughout the summer, even when natural forage is seemingly everywhere. Imagine that appetite on super charge and consider the gathering. This annual reunion brings hundreds and sometimes thousands of bass into a single wintering area.

Based on decades of notes, it seems as though Smallmouth Bass migrate to these areas by year-class. With the younger, smaller bass arriving first followed by larger fish. Often in the earlier days of October, trophy-sized bass will remain in ambush points less than a mile from the main pool, usually in shallow, swift water, feeding on minnows and crayfish. These are very active bass, willing to chase long distances for a chance at a big meal.

Spinnerbaits, crankbaits and suspending jerkbaits work best as they allow the angler to cover water quickly. I prefer noisy crankbaits and jerkbaits over silent ones in the fall. This is the time of year when noise and disruption pays off. The object is simple, cover as much water as possible while paying attention to the details. When strikes occur, and they will, duplicate what is producing. Turning your attention to the lure type, size, retrieval speed and type of water/structure can produce an action packed day.

Top water baits are also your friend in the early days of autumn. Here, cloud cover is far less critical than any other time of the year. Bass will strike on even the sunniest days, so discard the rule book during this time of year. Another amazing part of the top water



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**MAKE IT A SAFE DAY
ON THE WATER!
ALWAYS WEAR
YOUR LIFE JACKET.**

Personal flotation devices (PFDs, life jackets, life preservers, life vests and throwable devices) are the most important piece of equipment on a boat. They are the best defense against drowning. Each person in the boat must have a wearable, USCG-approved life jacket, **NO EXCEPTIONS!** It is highly advisable to wear life jackets at all times, especially in dangerous conditions.

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bite is just how incredibly shallow the water these bass will lurk. I will often find monsters in less than a foot of water. Regardless of depth, my favorite top water baits are walk-the-dog type plugs, but poppers and prop baits also work well.

As the water temperature drops to the 50s and upper 40s, the tactics can change a bit. While I still throw crankbaits, spinnerbaits and jerkbaits, I will also use minnows and tube jigs. Bass are still very active as the water temperature cools. Anglers will find that the main pool area will now hold the best numbers of bass. By now, 90 percent of the bass are in the wintering pools and bottom-oriented baits will often find pods of fish. The tried and true tube jig is a favorite. Rigging styles go from the insert jig to sled head style rigs. Sizes will range from angler to angler but the colder the water gets, the smaller the profile used. Let the bass dictate what they want. I have seen days when 3-inch single dipped tubes outperform thicker 4-inch or more tubes. Other days, it's just the opposite.

Swimbait are also high-producing jig baits. These versatile baits can be rigged and fished a number of ways. You can swim, twitch, hop, bounce, pause, drag or just let them sit on the bottom. There are a number of styles, sizes, colors and brands available. They are 2 inches or larger. I prefer those that fall into the 3-inch to 4-inch size, but don't shy away from the 5-inch or larger swimbait. I have seen bass eat 6-inch Creek Chubs without hesitation.

When the autumn water temperature drops, slow presentations are often preferred. Hair and silicone jigs are highly effective. Ranging in size and types of hair or strands of silicon with or without trailers, the offerings are almost endless. From the coarse hair jigs made from deer and bear

to the soft hair of beaver and fox, hair jigs are made from tufts of hair tied onto the shaft of a jig. Another type of hair jig is made out of cross-cut rabbit hair that is wrapped around the shaft of the jig from just above the hook's bend to the shoulder of the jig head. The colder the water, the less "body" I give to the jig. Regardless of what you prefer, hair jigs are a necessary part of your late autumn bass arsenal.

So, give a second thought to hanging up your fishing gear early this year, and experience some of what autumn bass fishing has to offer. ☐



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