

# MUDDY WATER

## Trout Fishing

by Nathan Woleslagle

photos by the author

Many avid trout anglers dread high and muddy water. These conditions often make fishing for trout in streams seemingly impossible. Many anglers will stay away until the water lowers and clears. While anglers may be tempted to do so, the fish, however, are still around. Even in the muddiest water, trout can still be caught. With a positive mindset, paired with some proven tactics, anglers can turn the bad conditions in your favor and still catch fish.

First and foremost, safety must be your top priority. If the creek or stream is dangerously high, stay away and wait for lower water. When fishing, make sure to stay back from the edge of the streambank. Slipping and falling into swift currents will ruin the day. Wading in high water is never advised, even if the water you are fishing is familiar. No fish is ever worth risking your or another angler's safety.

With all of this in mind, fishing for muddy water trout can be a great experience. When choosing a stream to fish, it is best to know the water condition beforehand. There is a fine line between a stream being too high to fish and just right. If the stream you plan to fish is pushing water at a high rate compared to normal and is well over its banks, the stream is not fishable. Give the stream a day or two to drop, and fish it whenever the water is just slightly above its banks.

It is also important for a muddy water trout angler to keep in mind that every stream is different. While one stream may be unfishable, on the same given day, another stream close by may be in decent shape. I like to have at least three different fishing options before heading out.



The ideal stream may be a bust or the fish may not be cooperating. Having different options will give anglers enough water to stay casting all day and catching trout.

A fantastic option for muddy water fishing tends to be fishing for native Brook Trout. Mountain streams where native Brook Trout and wild Brown Trout live should never be overlooked after periods of rain. These streams tend to be the first streams in most areas to become fishable. Also, high and off-colored water can be the best conditions to fool inhabitants.

Keep in mind where the trout may be in muddy water. There are some key things to look for to find the location of trout. Start with favorite fishing holes and runs where you know fish regularly reside. Next, look for the slowest and calmest water. This could be a backwater eddy or often water flowing along the banks. Fish will sometimes



*This holdover Brown Trout fell for a live minnow in high water.*

will locate fish right away, and other times, it may take some searching. When you land a fish, keep fishing the same spot. Where one trout is, often, many others will be in the same location. Fishing muddy water for trout can be challenging but rewarding. Fishing pressure is usually light, so expect to have most of the water to yourself. Assess a stream's condition before fishing and always put safety first. It is always a good idea to let others know where you are fishing. The next time the trout water near you turns brown, you will know that opportunity still awaits. ☐



*Small minnows are great baits for muddy water trout.*

migrate and stack up in these areas to avoid stronger currents and preserve energy while searching for food.

This is also a great time to explore new water. High water levels often expose and create new holding spots for fish. Semi-submerged trees and freshly flooded rocks are two of my favorite high water locations. Fishing the slack water behind newly submerged structure can often get results.

After finding some ideal locations, it is time to get a line in the water. The trout will mainly be feeding on worms and other insects that are being pushed around by the swollen water. Baitfish will also be on the menu as baitfish often seek refuge in the same areas as trout. Some great baits consist of whole nightcrawlers, live minnows and spinners. Threading small Fathead Minnows or shiners works extremely well. Spinners with gold or silver blades will catch fish and are great lures to cover water. The vibrations given off by the spinner, paired with the flash, can trigger trout into biting. Using a whole nightcrawler, instead of a piece, tends to attract more bites. The entire worm will offer a larger presentation this trout can locate easier in the muddy water.

For the fly angler, muddy water can still offer opportunity. Large Black Nymphs are a must. Black Stonefly Nymphs along with Woolly Buggers work especially well. Bring plenty of splitshot along, as it may take a few to get flies quickly to the bottom to achieve an effective drift. If available, sinking line can also help with the drift.

It is important to fish thoroughly and drift baits through every prime inch of water. Sometimes anglers



*Whole worms offer a larger presentation, which allows trout to find worms easier in off-colored water.*



*Spinners are a great lure to effectively cover water and can excite trout into biting.*