



Fishing for **BIG BASS** in the Winter

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photos by the author

Winter can be a bleak time of year for avid bass anglers. Cold water and cold air temperatures can make for exceedingly tough fishing conditions. Braving the frigid elements seems questionable, but the bass you were catching during the warm portions of the year are still swimming around in Pennsylvania's lakes, ponds and rivers. The bass probably have not seen many lures recently, as fishing pressure tends to be exceedingly light during the winter on most waterbodies. So, what if I told you that winter is a great time to target large bass?

First, we need to define what conditions make for good bass fishing in the winter. To target large bass this time of year, open water is required to cast lures and efficiently cover water. Ice fishing for bass can be an excellent fishing opportunity as well, but the tactics that are about to be shared are for open water fishing purposes. Along with open water, fishing during warming weather trends is your best bet. Frigid days or long periods of cold winter conditions often do not make for successful bass fishing outings. The bass, much like us, become more active when the weather is nicer during the winter months.

Periods of warm weather can trigger big bass to somewhat emerge from a sluggish cold water mentality and feed. Due to open water being needed, often the transition from fall to winter and winter to spring provide ideal conditions to target bass. Depending on weather trends, opportunity can be had throughout the entirety of the winter season when ice is unformed or after it melts.

Once decent weather provides fishing opportunities, locating where winter bass reside is your next step. When fishing lakes, rivers and ponds, moving water seemingly always holds fish in the winter. Moving water produces an ideal place for bass to easily ambush forage, as prey is often washed right to bass. Look for culverts, creeks flowing into bodies of water or the transition of shallow riffles flowing into deeper holes in rivers. Another ideal place to target winter bass is riprap and rocky structure. Rocks absorb sunlight and hold heat. This causes bass to stage up around rocks in the cold months. Bass will often be deep this time of year, so shallow structure usually does not produce consistent action in the winter. Fishing deep, flowing water and rocks are your best bet.

There are certain tactics that consistently produce big bass bites in the winter. The key is to fish slowly during this time of year. Dragging a football head jig paired with a chunk trailer is a staple winter presentation. A football head allows the jig to sit flat on the bottom and crawl over most bottom structure. The chunk trailer will help simulate



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a crayfish or potential meal and offer some slight action to your jig. Dragging the jig slowly across the bottom, and then letting it sit still for about 15 seconds to even a minute can entice large, sluggish, winter bass to eat.

Another great winter technique to implement is fishing crankbaits. Flat sided crankbaits work well, because these crankbaits offer a tight wobble that drives cold weather

bass crazy at times. Some other great crankbait options include square bills in various sizes to match the depth you are fishing and lipless crankbaits. When fishing riprap, cast parallel along the rocks, and perform a slow, steady retrieve. Make sure your crankbait is thoroughly digging and deflecting off the bottom, as this is key to drawing a reaction strike. Crankbaits also produce bites from big bass around submerged wood and even in open water this time of year.

Finesse presentations can produce both large bass and often higher numbers of bites. Ned Rigs, hair jigs and curly tail grubs fished on a simple jig head are all great choices. For Ned Rigs, throwing a small soft plastic craw on the back can be deadly. For hair jigs, Bucktail Jigs will produce bites. Another great option are marabou jigs, which produce more action than stiff deer hair. Curly tail grubs, such as Zoom Fat Alberts, are a consistent winter bass catcher as well.

Regardless of presentations, it is important to fish slow and thoroughly cover the water where you think the bass are residing. Allow the bass time to swim over and investigate your presentation before recasting. Once you catch a bass or two, stay put. Where there is one winter bass, more bass will be lurking nearby. Winter bass fishing can be a true test of an angler's patience, but the reward is there for the taking.

When the opportunity presents itself during the coldest portions of the year, big bass can be caught. While the bites may be few and far between, the chances of that one bite being a large bass are high. Winter is a big bass season, but don't tell anyone. ☐



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