

OPENING DAY OPTIONS



by Richard Tate *photos by the author*

Pennsylvania offers two opening days for trout season—one in the southeastern counties and another statewide. No matter which opening day a trout angler chooses as the beginning of the traditional trout fishing year, there are several options to begin the season.

Probably the most common way for a trout angler to begin the season is to visit a trout stream that has been stocked with hatchery trout. For many years, these stocked trout included Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout, and Brook Trout. However, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission eliminated Brook Trout from the stocking program, because stocked Brook Trout can spread gill lice to wild trout. So, this year, stocked trout waters will be stocked with Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout, mainly Rainbow Trout.

When an angler chooses to begin his or her trout season on a stocked trout water, the angler needs to recognize that he or she will be sharing the water with many other anglers. This is especially true in more urban areas.

When fishing a stocked trout water, it is helpful to know the locations trout are stocked. These are often pools near bridges or near other roadside pull-offs, where it is generally easy to stock trout in the water. However, these are not the only locations where stocked trout will be found. Trout often migrate upstream or downstream

from stocking locations. If there is high water, the trout may migrate away from stocking areas. Two years ago, I found a large golden rainbow trout more than 1 mile downstream from the last bridge where trout are stocked on that stream. Though I failed to catch it, I did manage to land several Rainbow Trout that were probably stocked at the same time.

The option of fishing a stocked trout water on opening day allows an angler a number of opportunities for catching trout. The most popular live bait is still probably the worm in sizes ranging from small red worms to large nightcrawlers. Earthworms probably account for more opening day trout than any other bait. Even so, some first-day anglers prefer to use smaller mealworms that they believe are more effective on stocked trout. Some live-bait anglers prefer to use minnows for their opening day exploits, hoping to catch larger-than-average fish.

Other baits that are popular on opening day are Powerbait and salmon eggs. Some anglers vow that one color of egg is more effective than another and like to attach kernels of corn to their hook for opening day trout.

Besides stocked trout waters, many Pennsylvania lakes and ponds are also stocked with hatchery-raised trout. When fishing these still waters, set up along the shoreline and cast to areas where you suspect there may be trout. On larger lakes, it is advantageous to have a boat where you can escape the crowded conditions that exist along the banks of many stocked lakes. For instance, this is true of Blair County's popular Canoe Lake. Anglers



A large crowd, mainly kids, on a stocked pond on opening day.

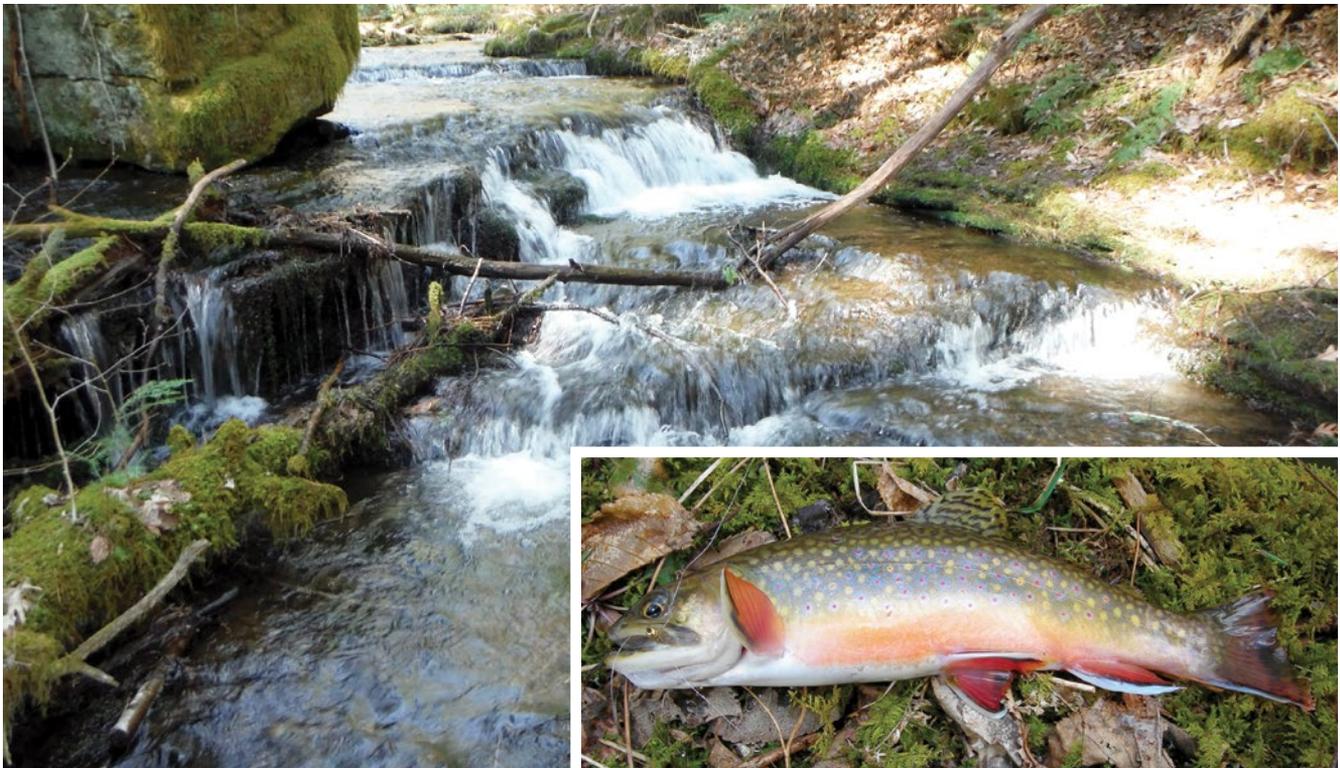
with rowboats and canoes often head for a deep channel where trout sometimes congregate after being stocked. In addition, anglers can use their watercraft to fish some of the more isolated areas of the lake that bankside anglers cannot reach.

Bank anglers have smaller ponds mostly to themselves, though conditions are often crowded. I have spent several recent opening days on a small, popular Blair County pond. For the most part, adults are there accompanying children, so the kids can experience an exciting opening day. At 8:00 a.m., hundreds of lines are cast into the pond, and many of the baits and lures are grabbed by hungry trout. The interaction between kids and their parents help make this pond one of my favorite opening day locations each spring.

Most of the baits that stream anglers use can be effective in stocked ponds and lakes.

Another opening day option is to fish a wild trout stream. Many of these streams are remote mountain brooks and runs, which are the homes of our state fish, the Brook Trout. Anglers who cherish solitude when fishing may choose to visit these streams on the regular opening day of trout. The use of live bait, such as a small earthworm, may tempt Brook Trout. However, many of these wild trout enthusiasts will toss small spinners or cast artificial nymphs or even dry flies in their efforts to deceive wild trout. When they land a wild Brook Trout, most of these anglers briefly pause to admire its explosion of colors before releasing it.

The opening days of trout season are truly special days on an angler's calendar. ☐



A remote wild trout stream that some anglers favor when seeking opening day solitude.

Anglers are drawn to wild trout streams on opening day in search of wild Brook Trout.