



## Fall Smallmouth Bass—Season of Giants

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*photos by the author*

When summer transitions into fall and the temperatures begin to drop, Smallmouth Bass fishing also transitions into a new season, one of giants. The months of September through late November are known to many bass anglers as one of the best time periods to catch big Smallmouth Bass and sometimes several in a single outing. Pennsylvania offers a plethora of destinations to fish for fall Smallmouth Bass across both rivers and lakes.

Pennsylvania is home to many productive Smallmouth Bass rivers. The Susquehanna and Juniata rivers are two of the most established and well-known fisheries, but many others hold giant Smallmouth Bass in the fall. Stretches of the Delaware River, Pine Creek, and even the lower stretch of Penns Creek offers anglers opportunity. The rivers and large creeks around Pittsburgh in western Pennsylvania are also notable Smallmouth Bass fisheries.

As far as lakes and reservoirs, you are not short of options. Lake Erie, Erie County, is renowned as a world-class fall Smallmouth destination. Lake Wallenpaupack, Pike and

Wayne counties, and Raystown Lake, Huntingdon County, are both great large lakes with established Smallmouth Bass populations. For further potential fishing locations, a great resource to utilize can be found on the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's website at [www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com) under the "Best Fishing Waters" section for Largemouth and Smallmouth bass.

Once you have a location narrowed down, it is time to rig a rod and start casting. Techniques for fall Smallmouth Bass vary, but there are some key techniques that prove productive for myself every fall. In September and into early October, a small popper or walking bait can prove deadly on aggressive large Smallmouth Bass. In the mornings and evenings, Smallmouth Bass can be seen actively chasing baitfish. A topwater lure in this situation can prove the best bait of choice.

When November and colder temperatures stay consistent, the topwater bite begins to slow down. Two additional techniques that excel in colder water temperatures are jigs and jerkbaits. Curly tail grubs, especially larger 3-inch grubs, fished on ¼- to ⅛-ounce jig heads imitate numerous types of prey for Smallmouth Bass and draw bites from big bass. Jerkbait is a great lure choice to cover water to initially locate fish, as Smallmouth Bass in the fall can often be found schooled up. Jerkbait



*A Smallmouth Bass caught while fishing from a canoe in the fall.*

presentations have caught me more Smallmouth Bass over 3 pounds than any other lure I use. Jerkbait is loved by bigger Smallmouth Bass.

A personal favorite way to target large Smallmouth Bass is to float a slow stretch of the Juniata River in a canoe during mid-October. A canoe offers a low presence in the water and does not disturb as many fish as a boat when the water is low. During this time of year, weed beds from the summer months begin to die off and clump in slack water areas. Large Smallmouth Bass utilize the dead grass to hide under and wait to ambush potential prey. Casting curly tail grubs parallel to the grass clumps proves deadly time and time again. The big Smallmouth Bass just cannot resist an easy meal.

Another unique fall Smallmouth Bass fishing opportunity is to jig live minnows. While live minnows work year-round, Smallmouth Bass seem to especially love minnows in the fall. Jigging live minnows in deep water over rocky structure in lakes can draw bites from big bass. Bouncing minnows below fast water in rivers is also a great technique. Large Smallmouth Bass in the fall will use the current often to ambush baitfish.

Bank or shore fishing in the fall should not be overlooked as well. A popular spot where the Susquehanna and Juniata rivers meet, known as "The Point", has produced many large Smallmouth Bass for shore anglers during the fall. Fishing lakes from shore is also a viable option. Using live shiners

underneath a float can be extremely effective at catching big Smallmouth Bass in lakes from the shoreline.

Fall is an excellent time of year to hit the water in search of big Smallmouth Bass. The scenery of fall foliage and aggressive bites from hungry Smallmouth Bass can make for memorable outings on the water. The normally wary Smallmouth Bass tend to more willingly take lures, which keeps the excitement constant as any cast can produce something special. Plan a day and head out to your favorite Smallmouth Bass fishery this fall. A day catching Smallmouth Bass is always a day well spent. ☐



*Poppers and topwater lures are effective at catching Smallmouth Bass in the fall.*