

Back in the day

Key on color, cast, timing in tangling with walleye.

Kathryn A. Kahler

In spring 1968, fish managers across the state were concerned about the state of walleye fishing. Complaints they received suggested that “not everybody is using good fishing technique for catching walleyes.” Much like they do today in this issue’s annual Fishing Report insert, they got together and wrote an article in that year’s March/April issue of the Wisconsin Conservation Bulletin to offer their best advice on how and where to catch Wisconsin’s most revered game fish.

Collectively, they stressed that “whatever the variations are, if you can keep in mind the basic habits of the fish, you should have a good chance of success.” In individual accounts, they offered tips on lures, bait and the best times and places to find walleye.

Richard F. Harris, then-fish manager from Oshkosh, gave this advice for landing ol’ marble eyes.

The color of the bait is extremely important. The same kind of spoon in yellow and black many times will outfish 10-to-1 a spoon of red and white — or vice versa. I strongly urge those who wish to fish walleyes consistently and steadily not only to change bait but to change colors as well.

You can prove this to yourself if you hit a good walleye fishing day. Catch two or three fish on a certain bait and then change to another color — the same bait and size — and note the results. Many times you will be surprised at the difference in your fishing.

Many walleye fishermen lose prize walleyes because they do not react to a strike with a good hook-setting movement. Whether trolling, drifting or spin casting, react to a snag on the bottom or a fish strike with a hard, hooking motion. This will serve you in good stead in keeping from getting snagged too often, and also hook the hard-mouth walleye when he strikes your slow-moving bait. This is much more important in walleye spin casting than northern because the northern hits hard and hooks himself,



while the walleye seldom hits your slow-moving bait with the speed or pressure of a northern pike.

Many become discouraged spin casting or casting on a reef or bar for walleyes because in retrieving the bait slowly from the cast, they snag many times and need to move the boat to recover their lure. A tip on this might be helpful: Anchor the boat and cast from the rear. In this way you are throwing with the wind and achieve better distance and further, it allows you to un snag most of your lures without moving the boat.

During the hot summer months in shallow lakes, the speed of the retrieve, which is generally slow, can be increased somewhat.



A quartet of fishermen show off their haul of walleye from the Wolf River in this 1971 photo from the Department of Natural Resources archives.

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This is a period when the bottom is quite moss-covered and weedy, and it is difficult to scrape bottom without fouling up your bait. At this time you definitely can speed up so as not to touch bottom as regularly and still catch fish.

When is the best time to catch a large trophy walleye? Unquestionably, early in the season, as this is the time of the year when large fish have finished spawning and are eating ravenously. If you drop the right bait in front of a “momma” walleye early in the year when she is trying to recover from carrying a load of eggs, your chances of catching that trophy walleye from 20 to 30 inches is much better than later in the summer.

Unfortunately, some of the better walleye fishing comes during bad weather conditions. Most of the time that you tangle with big walleyes, you need to dress as though you were going duck hunting or ice fishing. 60

Kathryn A. Kahler is an associate editor of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.