

# Night-Time Strategies for Walleyes

*You Can Catch the Biggest Fish After Dark*

by  
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**T**hey're bigger, more plentiful, and more active. It's not just

Walleye's either, but Largemouth, Smallmouth, Flatheads, Channel Cats, and Pike. You don't have to take my word for it, check with anyone who has both day and night experience and they'll probably tell you the same thing.

I'm pretty well convinced that the fish we fish for at night are a completely different population of fish than those that bite during the day. I've caught plenty of 10, 11 and even 12 pound walleyes during the day, but nothing that approaches the 14 pound 1 ounce fish I caught at night. If you check around, you'd probably find that most of the state records were caught at night.

The uninitiated tend to think of

night fishing as somewhat cumbersome and difficult. The reality of

the situation is, that night fishing can actually be simpler and more

productive than daytime forays. The secret to being successful is proper planning. By having my rods ready to go, having a handful of crankbaits, rather than huge tackle boxes strewn about the boat, and a marked Fishing Hot Spots map detailing my #1, #2, #3, etc. spots to check, I quickly cover water and find and catch fish.

The first thing that goes into a good game plan for night fishing walleyes is defining the areas that offer the highest potential. Looking at your topo map, try to find the longest piece of structure, usually an underwater point, that extends from a shoreline area out to the deepest water in the lake. Understand that the point may look to be the biggest of the lake above water, but is the longest break-line underwater. The



**Capt. Mark Martin holds up a hog of a Walleye that hit floating rapala using the "dying minnow flutter"**

second type of area will be a weed line or gravel/rock area that drops off quickly to the deepest water of the system. Discount the area if the fish have to pass over a long flat to reach the area, it must transition quickly to the deep water with no impediments.

I call these areas break-line pile up areas. This is because we can find fish piling up that are leaving shallow water for deep, and at the same time holding fish coming from deep water to shallow. As a backup spot, look to large islands or sunken humps. This is a game of cat and mouse though, as fish that use these areas, come up and move off in short periods of time. You could hit every hump and miss the fish each time, or hit fish on every one. Experience in the system will tell you that there are preferred humps that the fish seem to use more often and stay for a longer period.

Now the attack portion of our plan really is two pronged. We need to troll to find the fish, then we'll switch over to casting once we've located a healthy pod. The key to making the trip enjoyable is being rigged and prepared before you leave the launch ramp. I always have my Lund 2025 Pro V clean of unnecessary fishing equipment and tackle. Assuming I'm fishing with a partner, I'll have three Gary Roach signature series 6'2" medium heavy spinning rods teamed with Abu-Garcia tournament series T2000 reels spooled with 6 lb. test Berkley XT mono for casting. I'll also have three 7'10" Gary Roach signature series Flippin' Sticks with Abu-Garcia

4600 reels spooled with 20 lb. Test Fireline for trolling. I leave the Mr. Walleye boards at home, because this is going to be a flat line, hand held rod, trolling experience. I'll be armed with minnow imitators like Rapala Husky Jerks, and Size 13 floating Rapalas, mid to deep runners like Risto Raps, and number 5, 7, and 9, Shad Raps. Colors can be a matter of preference for the night and body of water, so, I do keep a box of these baits on board.

Once arrived at my #1 spot, I can either troll with my Motor Guide Beast Trolling motor, or if it's really choppy troll with my Mariner 9.9 hp four stroke and use my TR-1 Autopilot (1 800 58-TROLL). Understand that there are really two parts to trolling effectively, your boat and your arm. The boat is just going to take you from one spot to another, your arm is going to be the one imparting action to the bait and catching fish. What I'll do is have one of us using a Shad Rap, and the other with a Husky Jerk or Floating Rapala. The first key is speed.

While holding the rod steady and moving along, you shouldn't be able to feel, or just barely feel, the bait slowly wobble from side to side. Drop your arm back, pause, and then sweep the bait forward, pause, and then drop the rod back maintaining a tight line, and repeat. This, "dying minnow flutter", is what triggers these fish to bite. More times than not, the bite feels like nothing more than a Perch nip on the bait. By hand holding the rod, you can set the hook and then figure out that the little Perch nip you just experienced is really a 10 lb. hog about to give you the battle of your life. There is kind of a stride, or

rhythm that you will hit, noticing exactly how many wobbles your bait gets when you sweep it forward, that will put you in a groove to catching fish.

Once I've hit a fish on one pass over an area, I turn the boat around and run the break-line again. If I pop another, that's my indication that the area has a concentration of fish and then it's time to switch gears to casting mode and really get into them.

Casting to these fish is done with the same bait selection we just trolled them with. I keep my eyes peeled on my Eagle X-85 LCR to maintain position along the break-line, and cast up towards the structure. I try to pinpoint my casts toward the obvious fish magnets like weed points and pockets, gravel humps, or any other distinguishable structure. Again, the way you work your baits is the key to success. Cast out, reel the bait down to its depth, pause and begin your dying minnow flutter retrieve.

This is without a doubt, a recipe for success for fishing your own body of water at night. The deal isn't quite complete though. These fish are on the move and feeding. That means that we can't get on one spot and sit on it all night probably, The bite will tail off and die, and then we need to begin our process all over again. The fish may have moved farther down the structure, or left it completely. By trolling the area again we can determine that answer. If the answer is that they left, be

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