

Lake Erie's Yellow Perch 2003 Hatch Best in Years

by
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Not in nearly a generation has Lake Erie been the nursery for so many yellow perch. And it's been more than a decade since the lake's walleye hatch has shown such strength as well.

Ohio recently completed its lake-wide survey of this year's perch and walleye hatch. Both showed strong gains. 'The 2003 class of perch and walleye could be a year to remember,' said Kevin Kayle, manager of the Ohio Division of Wildlife's Fairport Harbor Fisheries Research Station.

Kayle said that for yellow perch as surveyed from Fairport Harbor west to Vermilion, the hatch was 'as good or better' than in the previous 16 years. 'The only other even remotely comparable perch hatch like this was in 1996, and we're now catching those fish as our jumbos,' Kayle said. Likewise, the yellow perch hatch in the Western Basin is looking good, Kayle said. 'You can say that as well for the perch hatch from Fairport Harbor east to Conneaut,' Kayle said.

Of great importance to Lake Erie anglers is the walleye hatch. 'It looks like the best walleye hatch in the Central Basin since 1990, and indications are that the hatch also is very good to excellent in the Western Basin,' Kayle said.

big of a surprise, Kayle said. 'We had a relatively cold and hard winter, which helps 'set the fish up' for spawning; they sort of shut down and don't expend much energy when the water stays cold for so long,' Kayle said. 'They're better prepared for spawning.'

Assisting the hatch was good precipitation this spring that allowed for good flow into the lake. In turn, that led to good production of forage for the just-hatched perch, Kayle said.

'And we had a dry April without storms that cause problems during the spawn,' Kayle said. 'Much of this also applies to the walleye.' Kayle said this year's hatch of perch should start showing up on anglers' stringers in late 2005 with the walleye graduating to the ice coolers in 2006.

'If our 15-inch minimum length proposal becomes accepted,' Kayle said. However, even with the good hatches the state has no intention of retreating from its conservative regulations. After all, this was just one year class, though an exceptional one, Kayle said.

'We'd like to see this spread out over three, four or five years; even longer,' Kayle said.

Enjoy Lake Erie Fall Perch Fishing

The cooler days of fall herald the prime time of yellow perch fishing on Lake Erie. Light southerly or southwesterly breezes can bring out fleets of anglers young and old in search of yellow perch. The yellow perch's eagerness to bite and the simplicity of fishing techniques make this a sport revered by rookies and old-timers. All it really takes to catch some perch is a decent-working rod and reel with a crappie rig of 2 or 3 (size 6 or size 8) hooks and a sinker weighing 3/8 of an ounce or more. You can also use a perch spreader; a rig made of thin wire with a sinker in the middle and attachments for a snelled hook (a hook with a short segment of fishing line) at either side. Lake shiners are the best bait, but minnows, chubs or worms are fine. Fish at the bottom or just a few cranks up off the bottom. Sometimes, if the water is murky, anglers have attached flicker spinners and beads to their rigs for flash and attention-getting action.

Popular areas to catch Lake Erie yellow perch can be found outside any major harbor. Good locations to begin looking for perch are in 24-39 feet in the western basin and 39-52 feet in the central basin. Or just look for the nearest pack of anchored boats! As fall

Which really doesn't come as too

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rod; sometimes taking a step back is all it takes to bring the fish straight into the net. With a quick dip, the fish is scooped up. I then raise the net hoop above the water and work the long net handle back up the center of the boat far enough until I can back up off the casting platform and set the fish down on the casting deck for hook removal.

One of the biggest mistakes that I see netters make is to stick the net in the water and expect the angler to pull the fish into the net. This improper technique results in untold numbers of needlessly lost fish every year. I've literally netted tens of thousands of walleyes and other game fish over the years, so if you have any questions, mikeveine@trophyspecialists.com is my email.

progresses, you may see yellow perch schools moving in closer to the shoreline, so some might be available to anglers out on piers and in the bays. Most of the fish this year are running from just under 8 to around 10 inches, but if you are lucky you can run into a school of jumbos that average 11-12 inches. Their light, mild flavor has made them a Midwest favorite as a dinner or a sandwich. Check out some of our [favorite fish recipes](#).

Yellow perch populations have rebounded from low levels seen in the mid-1990s, thanks to some good hatches and wise, cooperative interagency management. Recent high-quality hatches seen in 1998, 2001, and now 2003, will help keep the perchin' great for years to come. The current sport fishing regulations for yellow perch in Ohio's waters of Lake Erie include only a daily bag limit of 30 fish per angler. There is commercial fishing (trap netting) for yellow perch in Ohio waters of the lake. The commercial fishery is regulated by individual quota in the western and central basins of the lake. Sport fishers are reminded to be on the look out for and avoid commercial nets when fishing this fall.

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specific edge that you have selected. If the walleyes are directly below and concentrated on a physical edge you can backroll a livebait rig, jig, or a bottom bouncer rig, keeping the bait among the fish you see on the depthfinder. If you find the fish strung out along the edge, keep the bait moving and they will bite. If they're clumped up in one spot, hover over them and vertically jig them.

Rocks also attract fish, try rocky shorelines. Rock piles, humps or where rocks and weeds meet or are intermixed, work it over thoroughly with a jig or live bait presentation. Try to determine where fish are holding. Keep asking yourself the question what is their pattern? Constant bottom contact is essential even though it increases the potential for snags. Use a small jig head with a wide hook gap to deliver the bait in wavy conditions. Leeches are an outstanding rock bait because they can take the pounding. Drifting the breakline on a windy day is a way to catch trophy walleyes. The tackle is simple and the methods are easy to learn. First, use jigs tipped with a crawler, leech or minnow. The size of the jig should be just enough so you have contact with the bottom. For example, on a river like the Mississippi, I prefer to use 1/8 ounce or 1/4 ounce jigs. The important factor here is the shape of the head. The head of the jig should be round or a stand-up type of jig. This design helps when you are in an area that has snags, especially in timber or rocks. When I am on Mille Lac, I might switch to a lighter jig, spinner or a live bait floater.

With the cooling temperatures and the rough and tumble weather of fall don't put that boat away just yet, get out and fish the edges for some fall transitional walleyes. You might be surprised at the wallhanger you hook into.