

Three T's of Fall Transition, Turnover & Trophy Walleyes

by
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As predator fish begin their fall feeding habits, their focus centers on large forage. Young of the year perch, cisco, river shiners and chubs, along with other forage, such as frogs, crawfish and even their own offspring will be targeted. Successful trophy hunters will match the hatch, almost scientifically, at this time of year. Imitation of the forage base is very critical and a key to productivity during the summer feeding binge!

Feeding forays are anything but mysterious! The fish have to eat a lot as summer activity increases. The predation cycle is in high gear on reefs, large points and adjacent flats.

Veteran anglers can predict these movements, and position themselves for hot late summer or early fall action on the biggest fish of the year. Big fish become vulnerable for longer periods in the fall because they move into areas where baitfish are staging, some remaining in the general area through winter. To catch walleyes during fall transition and early fall consider the tendency for walleyes to move up.

An obvious relationship exists between prey and walleye movements during this transition period. Forage fish move shallow during turnover and early fall because cooler water now becomes available there. And walleyes follow their food to these areas. The sunlight penetration also

makes a big difference as to where the walleyes are located on any given hump. You wouldn't think that sunlight penetration would go down as far as 25 or 30 feet but in clear lakes it does. So when fishing, pay close attention



to the sun and make sure that you fish the shady side of that hump. More active fish will be found in this area.

I prefer shallow rock humps with big, boulder-sized rocks. I also prefer them to be fairly close in proximity to shore. They don't necessarily have to be tied to the shoreline, but they should be fairly close.

The rocks, if they are close enough to the surface, absorb heat from the sun like a solar panel. The warmth attracts minnows and you know the rest. A few scattered weeds growing up between the rocks can be a

real bonus.

Massive bait schools break up and walleyes head for specific structural elements that funnel scattered, roaming forage past specific spots. Look for long fingers or spines that protrude toward the main lake. Roaming baitfish usually congregate along these fingers and filter down them. Walleyes wait at the tips. Find those spots and you'll find big walleyes. Bright warm days are preferred to cold, blustery ones. The sun is lower in the sky this time of year, so light penetration is decreased. However, bright days will cause the water to warm up, which will turn fish on. Frequently, action will be better from mid-day on. A wind coming into the rock pile can be advantageous, although I have enjoyed some nice catches on, calm days. Remember that the angle of the sun's rays is not as direct at this time of year so the fish can be quite shallow. The direction of the wind will have a lot to do with how the fish locate. Usually they will be working the windy side of the rock pile.

These spots vary but are based on factors like: water temperature, availability of baitfish, oxygen, light level, structure and schooling tendencies. Success rests with proper presentation. Once you have located the edge and fish, the next step is to entice them to bite. Your bait presentation will depend upon the

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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.