

Nick Sissley column

How to catch a musky

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by Nick Sissley

Maybe this will be the spring you boat your first musky. That is it'll be your

first unless you've already enjoyed the satisfaction of hefting a musky of your very own with a huge net. Whether you have or not, I'd like to suggest a relatively new method of fishing for them, one that I've found to be extremely productive. Phil Thomas, the fishing dentist of Stoneboro, Pa., must get all

the credit for teaching me this musky taking technique—jerk baits.

The plugs are massive—maybe eight to twelve inches long! They're funny shaped, too, not much like the outside Rapalas and huge Creek Chubs most musky buffs are accustomed to casting and trolling. Jerk baits come in different

configurations, but they're made to literally jerk through the water. Musky plugs of yesteryear don't lend themselves well to jerking, so you have to go out and buy yourself half a tackle box full of new lures. And they won't be cheap either—if you can find 'em—which won't be easy. A few of the brand names of

these jerk baits are the Suick, the Teddy Bait, the Reef Hog and the Flap Shiner. Expect a good selection to set you back a C note. Don't complain. Look how much time, effort and loot you've invested in trying to catch that first musky already.

Find yourself a weed bed in a lake that you know contains muskies, and don't wait around until mid-summer to get started. Now's the time to experience the best action—right through the end of June. Cut the boat's motor upwind of the weed bed, then drift across it, casting that long and heavy jerk bait as you make your drift. Try to cast so that you're not retrieving in the same direction the boat is drifting. If you get a strike it'll be too tough to set the hook.

The retrieve is the key. Make long sweeps of the rod so that jerk bait responds with just the right action. It will vary with each type of lure. Some require two foot sweeps of the rod tip, others longer eight foot sweeps. Spin the reel handles as fast as possible. This keeps slack out of the line and the lure moving as fast as possible. Muskies seldom sock a bait that isn't racing like its trying to escape.

Some jerk baits dive deeper than others. Few dip much more than five or six feet. The idea is to use the jerk lure that dives right to the top of the weed bed you're fishing. Muskies are hiding in those weeds, ready to attack—if you present the bait properly. On most occasions the toothy and moody prey will be lurking right along the edge of the weed line. Concentrate your casts in this area as you make the drift. But sometimes muskies move right into the middle of a weed patch, so keep casting as the wind blows you over what might be a productive lair. Jerk baits give muskies a new lure type to look at. That's why they're partial to them. I heaved all manner of musky lures for about 400 hours before I caught my first one, but since I've been slinging jerk baits, my success has skyrocketed. Yours will, too, if you try jerk baits for muskies and follow these suggestions.



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