

# Focus on Fishing

Guidelines for success

## Smallmouth bass

### General facts

Best known for their airborne leaps and sudden deep dives, smallmouth bass are one of the most exciting species to catch. They are found in medium to large streams and clear, deep lakes and reservoirs. Unlike their close cousins the largemouth bass, smallies prefer cool, clear, swift rivers and cool, deep, rocky lakes. Perhaps James A. Hensall said it best in his *Book of the Black Bass* (1881), "...inch for inch and pound for pound, the gamest fish that swims."



### Seasonality

Similar to largemouth, smallmouth bass become more active in the early spring when water temperatures rise above 50° F. Smallies seek out shallow spawning areas with gravel and rock adjacent to deep water. The summer heat results in a large number of smallmouths moving to deeper areas of the lake with dropoffs and mounds. In rivers and streams, summer smallies will concentrate around breaks in the current near deep water. In late September and October, smallmouths school heavily in open areas of lakes and rivers, feeding on available forage. When water temperatures drop below 50°F metabolism slows, prompting these fish to move into deepwater wintering areas.

Prime Fishing Time	
Season	Time of Day
Spring	Daytime
Summer	Early morning, evening and night
Fall	Daytime
Winter	Daytime

### Bait

Live minnows, worms, crayfish, and hellgrammites are common baits for smallmouth bass fishing. Add small split shot (size #7) 6 to 12 inches above a #2 hook. In rivers and streams, cast into current breaks and eddy areas, then let the bait drift and bounce along the bottom.

### Artificial Lures

**Crankbait** – Try a #9 floating rainbow trout Rapala. Use the recommended *Rapala Knot* and the slowest retrieve at which you can feel the lure working. For lakes, try a Rapala DT-6 in hot mustard or shad colors.

**Jigs** – A 3.5- to 4-inch green pumpkin tube bait with 1/8 to 1/4 oz. jig. Cast in slow current areas, let sink, twitch, retrieve a few turns and let sink again. Repeat.

**Spinners** – Use a size #2 silver or gold spinner with a slow retrieve. For lakes, try a chartreuse and white 3/8- to 1/2 oz. spinnerbait that has either gold or chartreuse-and-white willow leaf blades.

### Gear:

*Fishing Rod* — 5.5 to 7 ft.

*Line* — 6 to 14 lb. test monofilament

### Key Fishing Areas:

Canistear Reservoir, Clinton Reservoir, Echo Lake Reservoir, Manasquan Reservoir, Merrill Creek Reservoir, Monksville Reservoir, Oak Ridge Reservoir, Round Valley Reservoir, Splitrock Reservoir, Union Lake, N/Br and S/Br Raritan River and Delaware River.

### Size:

Adults typically range 1-4 lbs. (average 1.5 lbs.)

### Skillful Angler Award (min. size):

*Adult:* 4 lbs.

*Junior:* 3 lbs.

*Catch & Release:* 19 in.

### State Record:

7 lbs., 2 oz., Round Valley Reservoir (1990)



In the summer, wade the upper Delaware or Raritan River casting a shallow diving crankbait, or spinner. If fishing with crayfish or hellgrammites, keep them alive by storing in a container with wet burlap in your fridge or other cool place.