



When it comes to fishing, have you ever heard or read about the word pattern being used in a conversation and didn't quite understand the concept? Maybe you were thinking that it is just a fancy word that fishermen like to use to make themselves sound important. This isn't so according to a dictionary, as 'pattern' means; to copy; to follow after; or a model to be copied after. Let's discuss a few patterns that might help you catch more fish the next time you are on the water.

Time of Year

Smallies can be patterned pretty much throughout the entire fishing season, but early and late season seems to be the best times of the year to locate and copy your technique on different spots all over the lake.

Lets start at the beginning of the season, which can be as early as May, depending on your geographical location. After a long winter, smallmouth start to move on and off spawning grounds. Depending on water temperature, they can be in 2-feet of water or 28-feet of water. You might have success throwing a Rattlin' Rap (which is my favorite for shallow fish) in shallow rock that has big boulders, or jigging a Mister Twister or working a tube jig in

deeper water off a break line. Pay special attention to what, where, and why you are catching fish. If you repeat the same successful fishing techniques at different locations around the lake that have the same sort of structure, cover, and water depth, you may start to see a true pattern emerge.

After the spawn and when the lake begins to heat up in the summer, smallmouth will start to suspend and chase baitfish. This is when a trolling pattern can pay off with big dividends. Rapala's DT series are great baits to pull because of the repeatability of the running depths they have. Pay close attention to your sonar unit and what depths the fish are located at. You might be trolling a certain contour line for example in 27-feet of water, and have a trolling speed of 2 miles per hour and doing well on a lure that

dives to 10-feet. Copying this same pattern should produce at different locations around the lake. Don't overlook trolling spoons, like the Mooselook Wabler in chrome/blue, as they can be deadly for suspended smallies. Weighting the spoons down with lead clipped on your line, or utilizing downriggers or Dipsy Divers can all be productive with spoons.

Late summer into early fall is one of my most favorite times of the year to pattern smallmouth bass. When the weather temperature starts to cool down, smallmouth really start to feed heavily, getting fat for the long winter ahead. Fishing shore line breaks that drop fast, boulder fields with rock rubble, mid lake shoals with fast breaks or long points that have nice tapers are key spots to look for this time of year. Being a predator and an opportunistic fish, these areas give the smallmouth great ambush and hiding spots. Smallmouth will constantly be moving, following the break line or taper, so following these areas with your boat will help you locate them. Soft plastics like the Exude Comida worms fished weightless or Mister Twister G-Grubs on a drop shot rig, are techniques that can be copied throughout the lake with great success in the fall.

I recently fished the Canadian Fishing Tour's National Classic out of Kingston Ontario. Let me tell you, it is a fun place to fish with unbelievable numbers of smallmouth and largemouth bass. I had five days of practice leading up to the tournament, and after a few days of practice a solid pattern started to emerge for me. I would look for mid-lake shoals with the aid of my electronics and Navionics hydrographic charts, and would proceed to boat around the shoals looking for fast breaks. I found numbers of good

smallmouth relating to fast breaks that dropped sharply to 17- to 21-feet or so. I must of fished 20 spots of very similar structure, and they all held fish. Drop shotting soft plastics did the trick for me, but rather than just holding onto the rod and dead sticking the bait, I did work it to trigger strikes.

Gear

When it comes to throwing soft plastics like the Mister Twister G-Grub, Twister Tails or tube jigs, a spinning rod and reel combo is hard to beat. I use a 6' 8" extra fast medium action Legend Elite rod by St.Croix. This rod has unmatched sensitivity allowing me to really have control and feel of my bait as I work it over the structure or cover I am fishing. Rapala's SX7i series is very affordable reel, which has a nice drag system, and we all know how important that function is. I am a big fan of braided line and have been using it since its inception, although I always use a fluorocarbon leader. I match the leader strength to the structure or cover I will be fishing. If rocks are involved, 12-pound Maxima fluorocarbon line is a good choice. This line has excellent abrasion resistance, giving me the confidence that if my leader goes through rocks and a fish eats my bait, I have a great chance to get her into the boat.

A bait caster will suffice for trolling, and of coarse for casting crank baits and spinner baits. A 6-foot, 6-inch to 7-foot medium to medium heavy action rod will do the job nicely. My bait casters are all Avid series rods. For spinner baits, I prefer a 6-foot, 6-inch medium heavy rod with a fast tip, and a reel that has a 6.2 to 1 gear ratio. I use a 7-foot rod with a similar reel for crank baits, but with a medium to moderate action. The 7-foot rod will do nicely for trolling cranks or spoons as well. For lipless cranks like the Rattlin' Rap, the 6-foot 6-inch rod can do double duty. Again, I use braid and always tie on a fluorocarbon leader.

When it comes to the drop shot, I use a 6-foot 9-inch medium light spinning rod with a fast tip. The reel should have a nice drag system, but the key is definitely the rod and hook. Because you are fishing with the hook tied directly to your line, you don't set the hook like you would with a crank or tube. You want the rod and the fish to set the hook. When a fish sucks the bait in, all you do is just lift the rod up. I use Gamakatsu drop shot hooks, as they have a nice big belly gap, and they are razor sharp so I don't miss many fish. I have my spinning reel topped off with 10-pound braid, and I use a 6- to 8-pound M a x i m a f l u o r o c a r b o n leader. This is where the medium light rod really starts to shine. The rod allows the fish to do his thing, and of course, takes up all the action, and with your drag system set right, you will not break off a fish.



The author holds up a nice Lake Simcoe smallmouth

Trolling crank baits will vary on the type of bait fish the smallies are eating. Long thin baits like the Husky Jerk can be trolled fairly quick along shoreline breaks, imitating smelt or shiners. Shorter fatter baits like the DT series, or the Shad Raps can be trolled slower, fished around drops or at the edges of drops or shoals. These of course would more likely imitate a shad like type forage.

When it comes fishing exact locations like a tapered point, soft

this again because I feel it is very important; pay close attention to where, how, and why you caught fish. A pattern will start to show itself, letting you fish different areas of the lake having similar traits.

plastics will be my choice every time. Whether you choose to fish a drop shot, grub, tube, Carolina or Texas style presentation, paying attention to what side of the point, the depth and bottom cover you are getting your bites on, will all give you signs of an emerging pattern for the day.

Baits

If covering a flat like a boulder field, casting lipless cranks and spinner baits will allow you to locate them quickly, possibly giving you an idea of where they are feeding on the flat. Once located, a more subtle approach like soft plastics might get you more bites. I will repeat

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Photos: courtesy of Mitchell Burke