

All Year Jerkbait

By [Mike Iaconelli](#)

I'm not going to lie to you. One of my favorite ways to catch bass is using a jerkbait. Because I am a true power fisherman, this technique allows me to cover maximum amounts of water, and allows me to generate that reaction strike that I'm always trying to generate. In fact, my first major win as a pro, the 1999 B.A.S.S. Top 150 on Lake Champlain, came in part to help from a jerkbait. So let's discuss the when, what, and where of jerkbaiting.

In my opinion the when, what, and where aspects of jerkbaiting are all closely interconnected. So with this in mind, let's break jerkbaits down by season first, and then going into detail about where to fish them and which kinds to fish. Remember jerkbaits are one of the few baits that are truly effective the whole year through.

Winter Period (water temp 40–55 degrees)

Even during the cold water period, when the fish are inactive and more vertical in their location, the jerkbait can be an effective tool. Generally during this period, the bass will be found in areas with the more vertical depth breaks, like main lake dam and point areas and areas in coves and creeks where the steepest banks exist.

The jerkbait can shine during these times, especially after one or two days of more stable and warmer weather. What happens is that after a brief stable or warming trend, the bass will use the small lips or shelves in their wintering areas. This could mean just getting shallower on the vertical breakline or shifting to a nearby flat or lip. Basically it puts the bass in an area that is a more accessible depth range for the jerkbait to be effective.

During this winter period, I select three models of jerkbaits: a sinking or countdown model, a suspending model, and a suspending spoonbill model. With these three types of jerkbaits I can effectively cover water down to about 16 feet. I generally use the suspending model and the sinking model for depths down to about 10 or 12 feet and I use the spoonbill for anything deeper than 12 feet.

I will use baits that range in size from as little as three inches to as much as eight inches long. The main consideration in choosing bait size is the size of the baitfish or forage you're trying to match. Are you trying to imitate small shore minnows, medium size dying shad, or giant yellow perch? Always try and match the forage to your bait size.

Also consider the depth when choosing bait size. Generally the larger model jerkbaits will dive deeper.

The next consideration is color. Again, as always, I try and pick a color that most closely resembles the forage that the bass are eating. Whites, silvers, chartreuse, firetiger, and gold colors make up most of my color selections at this time.

But, the most important factor during this time (winter period) is cadence. By cadence, I mean the rhythm at which you work and twitch the bait. In one word I can sum up what your cadence needs to be in the winter, "SLOW."

With suspending and sinking jerkbaits, I'll often reel them down to gain some depth, then I'll twitch them two times and just let them sit. This is the key! I'll experiment with pause lengths by counting in my mind for periods ranging from 5 seconds to more than 60 seconds. I know anything longer than 30 seconds sounds a little ridiculous, but it is the real key to catching them at this period. Once you get on the right rhythm you can be effective on every cast.

The neutral buoyancy or slow sinking of these jerkbaits is what triggers the fish into striking. It's just a real natural presentation during a time of the year where many of the forage species are dying naturally from the cold temperature.

With the spoonbill model jerkbaits I can more effectively cover the deeper zones from 10 to 16 or more feet. Instead of the twitch motion that I use with the suspending and sinking models, I use a longer pulling motion. To achieve this I just sweep my rod down to the side, still using the long pauses between sweeps.

During this period or anytime you're fishing jerkbaits, it's also important to think about line size. As in any fishing, the larger the line size the shallower and more buoyant your bait will be. The smaller the line diameter, the deeper and less buoyant the bait will be. With this in mind, I often opt for lighter line sizes during this time of the year. Fluorocarbon line in sizes ranging from 6 to 12 pound test is my norm. I will actually use my line to modify the action of the bait. I can cause a suspending model jerkbait to sink by going to a very light line size. I can also modify the sink or suspend rate by modifying my hook size.

I always like to go with the largest hook I can get away with. I often replace the factory size 4 belly hooks with larger size 2 hooks. This will give the bait a nose down, slow sinking fall.

Spring Period (pre spawn, spawn, and post spawn – water temp 55–70degrees)

Out of the four seasonal periods, this is my favorite time to fish a jerkbait. There are three distinct sections within the spring time period: the pre spawn, spawn, and post spawn.

During the pre spawn, the fish are starting to make the move from their wintertime locations to their spawning areas. In early pre spawn, the water temp is still cold, but increasing warming trends are causing the fish to start to slide.

I try and key in on what I consider staging areas between winter and spawn locations. These areas are typified by main lake points, secondary points, the ends of bluffs, and the deep edge of flats or shoals. The fish will stop and feed on these staging areas before moving on to their spawning locations.

In the cold water, I like to use the same jerkbaits and technique that I used during

the winter period. I do really start to favor the suspending model during this time frame and my cadence tends to pick up a little. Instead of two twitches, I may make three or four and will generally shorten my pause times. There is a lot of big bait this time of the year, so I match my jerkbait selection accordingly.

When the water temp. approaches the magic 60 degree mark, the spawn cycle is underway. The fish will swarm to the shallows in coves, creeks, bays, and flats.

Remember though, not all fish in the lake spawn at the same time. Generally the bass in the upper end of the impoundment will spawn first, followed by the fish in the mid lake area, and lastly by the fish down by the dam. Also not all fish will be locked down on beds. There will be a lot just up cruising.

During this period I almost strictly use suspending and floating jerkbaits. The suspending models can be killer for enticing bedding bass.

One of my favorite tricked up jerkbait during this time is the old Rapala 9S floating jerkbait. I'll take the standard model and replace the belly hook with a size #4 hook. On this hook I will add some lead wrap to get the bait to just barely suspend in the nose down position. I will also tie a liberal amount of red sewing thread to the back hook. It's a light bait so I throw it on a spinning rod.

Even after the fish are done spawning and post up, the jerkbait is killer. During this time, they're looking for an easy meal -- something that's easy to get. A slow floating jerkbait does this exactly.

Post spawn fish will often hang around the areas where they have spawned for a while. The males will actively guard fry for about a week and the females often move to the first areas of slightly deeper water. The fish also have a tendency to suspend around any available cover like docks, trees, or weeds.

During this post spawn, floating jerk baits are my number one tool. I will often fish it as a dual bait on every cast. What I mean by that is I will first fish the floating jerkbait like a top water and twitch it on top for the first third of the cast. During the remainder of the retrieve, I will twitch it erratically, occasionally stopping it all together and allowing it to float back to the surface.

Whenever I see fry, I will cast past the patch and bring the jerkbait into the school. This is a great imitator of another gamefish trying to come in and eat some of the fry.

One other trick during this time is to try and imitate the fry itself. You got to remember there's a lot of fry in the water and they're not all bass fry. You have carp fry, crappie fry, and bluegill fry all at about the same time. To imitate this I use an extremely small jerkbait from 1 to 3 inches long. I have to go to ultra light line and a light action spinning rod, but sometimes it's the perfect trick.

Summer Period (water temp 70 – 90 degrees

This is the one time of the year where I still use jerkbaits, but often other baits are more effective. My general rule of thumb for bass during the heat of the summer is deeper or thicker.

Deeper often means getting out of the effective range for jerkbaits of 15 or 16 feet.

So better tools during this time might be heavy jigs, crankbaits or Carolina rigs.

Thicker means that the bass bury deep into cover and vegetation. This obviously is not the most conducive areas to fish a jerkbait.

There are some places and conditions that I do like to fish a jerkbait in the summer though. First, I can often find some actively feeding fish on the flats and shoals early and late in the day. This is true especially on bodies of water that contain smallmouth.

I have two key jerkbait colors for smallmouth at this time. I like using a pearl blue back model to imitate alewife or herring and a clown color to imitate the yellow perch.

Another area in the summer that can be very effective with jerkbaits is the headwater or creek areas. In these feeding tributaries you will often encounter not only cooler water, but also current. In these areas the fish will set up in predictable locations, particularly in current breaks and eddies. I love to cast a jerkbait up stream at this time and work it back naturally with the current.

Fall Period (water temp. 70 – 55 degrees)

Besides the spring period, this is my second favorite time to fish a jerkbait. When the first few cold fronts start to hit during the end of the Summer Period, the bass are signaled to start making their fall movement.

The bass know instinctively to feed before the approaching winter. They will migrate back to many of the same areas they used during the spawn cycle. Flats and creeks are major feeding areas during this time, thus putting a lot of fish back into the effective depth range of a jerkbait. More than anything the bait is a critical element during this time of the year.

The baitfish will migrate to the shallows, especially on the flats, shoals, and creeks. The creeks with a direct influx of water in the back seem to be even better. These massive schools of bait, can often be seen swimming in pods and schools. When I see this, my mind starts thinking jerkbait, especially in bodies of water that contain clearer water.

I like both the floating and suspending models during the fall period. I pretty much strictly use natural bait colors during this time and I try and stay very aware of the size of the bait.

I love to target wind blown banks in the backs of the creeks or on main lake flats. Schooling bass will often be found during this time of the year around the pods of bait that we just talked about. I like having a jerkbait tied on that I can cast a great distance if I see surfacing breaking activity.

Tackle and Equipment

Lets talk about tackle and equipment for jerkbaiting. In my jerkbait fishing, I am looking for a rod that has the properties of a good crankbait rod. By this I mean I want a rod that has a fiberglass composite composition that allows me to do three things: get a slightly delayed hook set, land more fish because of the forgiving nature of glass,

and allows me to load up the light tip to achieve maximum casting distance. But it has to have a shorter length which allows me to impart the wrist action that is so critical in twitching a jerkbait.

I've found the perfect rod in a fiberglass rod in the 6 foot length. This rod has a shorter than normal handle, which is perfect for the wrist control needed.

I match this rod up with a reel that has maximum spool capacity for those giant cast and has a middle of the road retrieve speed. The only exception to the above is when I fishing a spoonbill, in which case I use the same rods and reels but just in a 6'6" model rod and a larger size reel.

In reference to brands of jerkbaits I really carry a tremendous variation of brands of both floating, sinking, suspending, and spoonbill. In floating I like the good old original Rapalas, Rouges, and Bomber Long A's.

In suspending, I like many of the new Japanese-type baits including the Lucky Craft and Megabass models. I also like Husky Jerks, Rouges, Bomber Long A's.

In sinking models I primarily like Rapala Countdown. And in spoonbills I use primarily a Rebel spoonbill which I modify to slightly suspend.