

# Fishing walleye through the ice

*“I mainly fish on stained-water lakes and have found that tip-ups fished with live bait can often catch more walleye than jig-pole fishing. But for clear-water lakes, jigging may out-produce tip-ups.”*

## Time of day

Time of day is often very important and this also varies with whether you're fishing on a stained or clear-water lake. On stained waters, the low light periods are usually the most productive, with the hour and a half before dark often better than the early morning period (and the bite often shuts down right after dark).

On clear-water lakes, you may often have to fish after dark to get the best catches, and sometimes all thru the night can be productive.

## Key spots to look for

Gravel bars and rocky drop-offs, weeds edges and mid-depth mud flats and break lines where gravel/sand turns to soft bottom are excellent holding locations for walleye.

## Best depths

On stained lakes, I like to concentrate my tip-ups in the 6-foot to 12-foot range. On clear lakes, the best depths are usually in the 10-foot to 20-foot range. However, fish movement does vary and depths as shallow as 2 feet and deeper than 20 feet can often be very productive as well.

## Bait use

Live bait is most often used on tip-ups. I prefer to use medium suckers or extra-large fatheads, but many anglers like golden shiners as their favorite bait. The old adage “the bigger the bait, the bigger the fish” is often true, but smaller sized bait can produce more action – which is often the goal when fishing with kids!

Minnows should be hooked lightly through the middle of the back so they hang in a horizontal position and stay lively.

## Bait placement

On stained lakes, I set my minnow about 4 to 8 inches off the bottom. On clear lakes, bait placement can be 6 inches to 20 inches off the bottom, as the fish can better see the bait above them and come up to get it.

## Line and hook tips

- Monofilament or fluorocarbon leaders are both good (though I've found that you have to re-tie more often with fluorocarbon as the knots fatigue more quickly than mono). Use a 2-foot to 3-foot leader that is attached to the nylon tip-up line (a small snap swivel works well for this).



*Tip up rigging with a successful afternoon trip... a perch and couple eater-sized walleye.*

### **Line and hook tips (continued)**

- Line markers – many people use a button, but I prefer a very small bobber. Reason why: the bobber will keep the line up off the bottom as a fish runs with the bait, whereas a button may drag along the bottom and catch on obstructions.
- For hooks, I like to use a double hook (a treble with one barb snipped off) or a single circle hook, and usually in size 8 or 6. I also place two small split shots about 7 to 8 inches above the hook to keep the minnow down near the bottom (see attached picture).
- Many people use small treble hooks but I've found that these can be very hard to remove from fish when your hands are wet and cold. In addition, walleye often swallow the bait and double and single hooks can usually be removed without much damage to the fish. If a treble hook is left in the fish, it can pinch the throat closed and this may keep the fish from eating until the hook becomes dislodged over time.

### **A final thought**

Remember – bigger is not better for eating quality with walleye. The best eaters are in the 12- to 15-inch size (if allowed by the harvest regulations) and catch and release does also work with walleye. Today's 20 inch release may be your 28-inch mounter several years down the road!

*- Skip Sommerfeldt, a fisheries biologist based in Park Falls, ice fishes about every day the ice is safe.*