



Most people think of catfishing as a mostly summertime activity, but catfish will readily bite even in the coldest water.

PHILLIP GENTRY | FOR THE JOURNAL

Coldwater catfish tips

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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With the start of winter around the corner, the start of winter fishing season is at hand. For catfish anglers, that can mean good things — as well as a few bad things.

The weather may not be as pleasant as it is the other three seasons, but that doesn't mean you can't catch catfish. In fact, many seasoned anglers prefer the winter months for chasing blue, channel and flathead catfish.

A few area catfish pros weighed in with some handy tips and tricks that should help you get more bites from catfish this winter, and also put more fish in the boat.

Catfish angler David Magness is one of those guys who actually prefers to fish during the winter. He said there are several things he does to help him catch more trophy blue catfish

"First, I'll look for a deep hole with not much current," Magness said. "In the winter, slack current is better because the fish don't feel like fighting the current."

Magness also changes what's on the menu.

"Most people use herring or cut perch year-round, but I will switch to shad for bait when the water is cold," he said. "I catch a lot of 2-to-3-inch threadfin and

gizzard shad throwing a cast net, and I believe that's what the catfish are accustomed to eating in cold water. Those shad, cut in half, are also much smaller baits, and that's another thing about fishing in cold water. You need to use smaller bait."

Catfish tournament pro David Shipman said rather than fishing right on the bottom, he tends to find catfish suspended up in the water column more during the winter than at other times of the year.

"Big catfish will suspend up 2 to 3 to 10, or even 12 feet off the bottom more in the winter," Shipman said. "I will use a bit heavier weight to keep the line vertical in the water and just ease around with the trolling motor allowing my baits to suspend up off the bottom and target those fish."

Another veteran tournament angler, Joey Pounders, loves to target flathead catfish, even in the winter, and has some great tips for flathead anglers

"A lot of people believe flatheads don't bite in the winter, and that's not true," he said. "The difference is they tend to congregate together in the

winter versus in the summer, when they spread out more. That means that you may have to fish 10 to 15 spots before you catch a fish.

"When you do catch a flathead in the winter, you need to stay put," he added.

Pounders said most of his flathead spots are submerged trees. In the winter, he will locate 10 or 12 of those trees in one general area before he starts fishing, but once he locates a tree that has at least one fish on it, it's very likely to have several more.

Like Magness, Pounders also prefers shad for winter catfish bait. He fishes them live and said the cooler water keeps them frisky longer.

"I can get 25 to 30 minutes of good, lively action out of each bait in the winter," Pounders said. "Compare that to about five to 10 minutes of so-so action in the summer, because the shad are so stressed in the hot water."

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