

Artificial's on Ice

If you are like most anglers, you have not given much consideration to incorporating artificial bait alternatives in lieu of live bait. Berkley's numerous offerings in their PowerBait and Gulp! lines being the most accepted. This reluctance is nearly universal when it comes to ice fisherman. A few of you may have used some for a very brief time, lost confidence in it and reverted to your old standby's of live bait. Too bad, because you're limiting yourself and ultimately your rate of success by doing so.

Don't get me wrong, live bait is and will always be a staple of ice fisherman. Waxworms and Euro larvae can be deadly on all species of panfish. Minnows at times will be the ticket, especially for the largest fish in each group you encounter. Through research and the miracles of modern science: we now have some very viable and effective options in the form of artificial baits. Some are made to resemble the real thing with a different texture and scent, while others don't look like much more than a glob, relying solely on scent.

Scent dispersal is the major attraction as these baits can actually emit more positive aromas than the real thing. Panfish are notorious for "sampling" then rejecting our baits and more often than not, they are in this neutral to negative mood due to their reduced metabolism in winter. This gives us another menu item to offer them and can prove to be the trigger needed to elicit a positive response, namely a bite. Texture can be another cue as these baits are denser and have a different feel when mouthing the bait. The inherent toughness also makes it more difficult for them to tear off the bait, resulting in additional attempts at it and more chances for us to sink some steel into their lips.

An additional benefit to the durable nature of artificial's is efficiency. Often times making them more effective than live bait, particularly when you have located a large roaming school. This is due to the fact that they allow you to get your bait back down to the fish as quickly as possible. Several fish can be caught without rebaiting. This can be key, as you may only have a short window to take advantage of a hot bite. The difference can be a couple of fish or your limit in short order.

Color options come into play as well. Nature simply cannot duplicate this. Drab and dreary at best and really doesn't stand out against the low light background beneath the ice. While not our primary concern (we have to find the fish first) hot colors may be just enough to get you noticed, investigated, and ultimately bit.

Another major and often overlooked quality is that artificial's won't give up and die on you. Always ready to go to work...even after forgetting them in the pickup overnight. I can honestly say that I have personally sentenced ten of thousands of waxworms to a frozen death in this manner. Never a concern with PowerBait or Gulp.

To get the most out of an artificial, you need to match it to an appropriate jig. I have found JB Lures Lil Bugger jig to work very well in this regard. Fishes very heavy for it's small size, allowing it to hang straight when using the lower test weights of Fireline. Lack of coils and stretch lets you "dance" the jig in place while slightly raising your bait to fool even the finickiest of fish. Try this for yourself and I think your eyes may be opened to the possibilities.

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