Water Temperature - Early Spring Fishing Conditions

Spring's fleeting sunshine heralds in the promise of a new fishing season, yet winter still maintains its grip on early spring cool water temperatures. Though water temperatures remain well under 50 degrees this past month, trout are now becoming a little more active as they emerge from their winter hiatus. Understanding how their feeding behavior relates to water temperature provides insight on what adjustments to your presentation will be most productive.





Caught on Vickie's Brown UV Crystal Pupa



Vickie's Brown UV Crystal Pupa

***Temperature Rules*:** Trout are ectothermic (cold-blooded). Their body temperature is regulated by their external environment. Trout sensitivity to water temperature allows them to detect even the slightest change in water temperature. Scientific research suggests fish can sense changes in water temperature as small as .03 (three hundredths) of a degree C (.05 degrees F).

This extreme sensitivity to water temperature acts as a driving force in controlling trout feeding behavior. I have found when the water temperature falls below 40 degrees F, trout become virtually inactive. This is because cold water temperature lowers their metabolism and decreases their need to feed. Their slow metabolism makes them lethargic and unwilling to expend energy to chase a fly. As water temperatures begin to warm, trout metabolism begins to increase along with their appetite. However, this is a very gradual process. The closer the water temperature inches to 50 degrees, the more active trout become.

For example, at the seven lakes I fished within the last month the water temperatures ranged between 42-49 degrees F. Trout became more active midday when the water was at its warmest. I found when water began to warm, the trout moved into the shallow shoreline areas to feed. These areas are the first to warm up as well as the first to cool down.

Cool water conditions cause trout to scatter so you should increase your prospecting area. I find a water thermometer and depth finder invaluable tools in defining my search area.

After ice out, avoid targeting the bottom of the lake as it will be devoid of trout. Instead, target 4-7 feet below the surface where the water is highly oxygenated. The bottom of the lake may be toxic due to the lack of oxygen resulting from the elevated levels of CO_2 (carbon dioxide). High CO_2 levels are generated by the

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decomposition of plant and animal matter over the winter. Spring winds will churn the water and dissolved oxygen levels will increase.

Fly selection: I start the day using either my Predator Leech or Predator Bugger as my search pattern.





Vickie's Burgundy and Black Predator Leech

When I observe more surface activity or hatched midges dancing their way across the surface, I switch to my white UV Midge Pupa. Its burnt orange UV thorax acts as a visual trigger while its white UV body and UV sparkle yarn tail enhance its visibility.

This fly is especially effective when I am fishing slightly stained water - common during spring due to the influx of minerals from spring run-offs.

Caught on Vickie's Burgundy and Black Predator Leech



Trout caught on Vickie's White UV Midge Pupa



Vickie's White UV Midge Pupa



Vickie's White UV Midge Pupa revealed under UV light

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Early Spring Fishing Tips

1. Cast toward shallow shorelines as the water begins to warm: These areas are the first to warm up. Early morning when water temperatures are still low, I find fish remain scattered throughout the lake. Only when water temperatures begin to rise do the trout move to the shallow shoreline edges. This may be more toward midday.

2. Slow your retrieve: When water temperature remains below 50 degrees, slow the rate of the retrieve and include a definite pause between each strip. Trout remain reticent to expend a lot of energy chasing a fly. If you are trolling, move slowly. You may increase the rate of your retrieve once the water temperature reaches 50 degrees.

3. Pause 5-10 or more seconds between retrieves: Fish will take the fly as it is dropping during the pause. The take may be soft; you may not know you have a fish on until your next retrieve. Therefore, it is important you remove slack from your line, otherwise it will be difficult to feel the bite and set the hook.

4. Cover a lot of area: Keep moving and prospect a lot of area for trout during cooler water conditions. Trout will be scattered throughout the lake.

5. Adjust fly color in stained water: I use black and white colored flies when the water is stained. White is more visible to trout from a distance and is the last color to disappear at distances between 7 and 10 feet. Black provides a distinctive visual silhouette. Both colors are excellent choices when fishing stained water conditions.

6. Add a water thermometer to your fishing tackle: A thermometer provides insight on how to adjust your presentation thereby helping you along your journey to becoming a “Fish Whisperer.”

What could be a better to shake off the winter doldrums than getting out and fishing?

Vickie Loftus

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