

# Walleye bite is on

## Late-arriving cold temperatures have extended the fishing season



Ted Peck

Three caught saugers will provide a tasty sandwich. With water temperatures falling below 48 degrees, walleyes have begun their feeding frenzy in anticipation of winter.

Seasonal change finally blew into southern Wisconsin with the dawn of the gun deer season last weekend.

Two days before deer season, bass and panfish were still biting like gangbusters. Water temperatures tickled 50 degrees. If you drive past quiet waters on the way to church this



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morning, you may notice ice on quiet waters.

bass rod and pick up the jig box. Prime time for catching river walleyes is at hand.

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Diverse interests and responsibilities push many anglers into following these pursuits, even though fall walleye action can be even more frenetic than seen during peak spawning activity in April.

Walleyes have just one mission now: feed heavily to survive the winter ahead. Water temperature is key in pushing the walleye 'eat' button. When autumn water temperatures fall into the 48-42-degree range, prime time has arrived.

Most years we welcome this walleye feeding window in late October. Smallmouth bass action typically slows down about the same time walleyes get active at about 48 degrees. Not so this year.

Two days before gun season I guided clients into a pile of smallmouth bass. The fish wanted Rat-L-Traps. Walleyes were tough to come by. Here we are, 10 days later and water temperatures across southern Wisconsin have already tumbled to 42-43 degrees.

Could we be fortunate enough to have another December like the one we experienced last year? My fishing diary says over 300 walleyes came over the gunnel of my Lund in December 2015.

Highlight of the entire year was tussling with a six-foot-long sturgeon for over two hours on Dec. 9. The last time the boat got wet last year was Dec. 21. Last spring, ice was gone below the Jefferson dam on Rock River by Feb. 20.

But flashback to the springs of 2013-2014 and the buzz amongst the angling fraternity was the possibility of setting tip-ups on opening day of the fishing season in May!

Perhaps the best advice from this point forward is to fish like there's no tomorrow. When you back that precious boat past where your wife's car spends the winter on the driveway into a warm garage, prepare it for hibernation.

To a rabid angler "winterizing" a boat is akin to euthanasia causing great mental anguish. Better to take the "drug-induced-coma" route, simply adding fuel stabilizer to the gas tank and ensuring the bilge and livewell are dry.

The only other thing you really need to do is ensure the outboard motor is hanging vertical

when the boat is put away to allow water to drain from the lower unit.

This is a good time to remove unnecessary gear. Space occupied by buzzbaits and bass rods can be used to stash another layer of clothes or a propane heater. Now is also a good time to remove half-eaten sandwiches and other goodies mice might find appealing.

There will likely come a time in the next 30 days when sensitive electronics should be moved to a place not subject to subzero temperatures and the boat's starting battery should get a final trickle charge.

Most 'serious' fishing boats have an on-board charger for trolling batteries. Tossing a sock full of moth balls or other mouse repellent in close proximity to this warm place is a good idea once winter arrives in earnest.

Meanwhile, we may still have almost a month to fish before its time to break out the ice auger and short rods.

Venison backstraps or fresh walleye fillets for supper? Tough choice.

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