

Spring Smallmouth at Tippy Pond

By Russ Gabel



Mention spring fishing at Tippy Dam, and images of steelhead come to mind. It's true that this is a great steelhead destination as they migrate up the Manistee River, but amid all of the discussion about the dam, many people overlook the 1220 acre lake on the other side of the dam. And if you're talking about spring fishing on Tippy Dam Pond, you're talking about smallmouth bass. Tippy Pond is loaded with these bronze bombshells, and in the spring, they are hungry, aggressive, and eager to take on all challengers. During a 5-day camping trip in the middle of May, I managed to catch and release over 140 smallmouth bass from the timber-strewn shorelines of Tippy Pond. With just few tips, you can get the most out of this amazing smallmouth destination.

LOCATION

Tippy Pond is a flooded river bed, so it twists and turns through the surrounding forest. This creates many small bays along the shoreline, and that's where you'll find the smallmouth. The fish are moving into these bays to feed and to spawn, so areas where the water warms faster will draw more fish. One indicator that seemed pretty consistent with locating the smallmouth bass was turtles. The turtles are also looking for warm bays with timber. If I pulled into a bay with scores of turtles sunning on the logs, that bay usually produced the better smallmouth action. Because the fish are looking for baitfish and spawning areas, they are going to be in the shallowest water that you can find. How shallow? I spent my first afternoon fishing fallen trees in 6-10 feet of water, with very little success. The next day, following the advice of a local angler, began casting my lure up onto the shoreline, then literally dragging it into the water. Honestly, I was skeptical as I fishing my lure in water that was only one or two feet deep, but after boating my fourth or fifth bass in just 10 minutes, I was a believer. These bass are shallow...really shallow. They are experts at blending into cover, so don't expect to see them very often. I can't count how many times I would cast next to a small stick or log in the water, then watch as a smallmouth appeared out of nowhere to run my lure down. Focus on fishing the shorelines of these bays, casting into shallow water near the fallen trees, and hold on.



LURES

I'm sure other lures, such as small plastic worms, jigs, spinner baits, and tiny crankbaits would draw strikes from Tippy's smallmouth, but nothing seemed to work better for me than a 4-inch Bass Assassin. I went through over 30 of these little gems during my five-day adventure. Rigged "texposed" (see picture) on a 3/0 wide gap hook, it swam perfectly in the shallowest water, yet managed to get around most of the trees and branches without snagging. I did notice several missed fish on the single hook, but adding a tiny treble hook as a stinger solved that problem. The erratic action of this lure drew wild strikes from these bass, appearing out of nowhere to blast this little bait. Shad colors with green or pearl flakes seemed to work best. The water is fairly clear, so choose natural colors.



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I think it's worth a moment to discuss line selection. While there are dozens of great fishing lines out there, I would also recommend using a good fluorocarbon line for this type of fishing. Before my trip, I spooled both of my reels with 12 pound Seagur Fluorocarbon. The abrasion resistance of fluorocarbon makes it ideal for working this lure through the tangle of fallen trees and logs. It also gives you a little bit of insurance should one of the numerous pike decide to take a shot at your lure. Most of all, however, fluorocarbon is a sinking line, so it allows the Bass Assassin to stay in the 2-3 foot range while still working the bait quickly back to the boat. On monofilament line, most soft jerk-baits tend to rise up to the surface of the water when you try to speed them up. Using a fluorocarbon line solves this problem and allows you to speed up your retrieve to trigger any fish that are following your lure.

Tippy Dam Pond is hands down, one of the most beautiful lakes in all of Lower Michigan. Surrounded on all shorelines by the Manistee National Forest, it's an amazing, pristine wilderness experience. Add scores of seemingly maniacal smallmouth bass, and you have the makings for an amazing spring fishing adventure that will start your fishing year off with a bang.

