

Freewater's Top

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The 5 most frequently used lures in our tackle box

By Russel Gabel

If you want to find the most frequently used lures in my fishing arsenal, don't bother looking in my tackle box...they never quite seem to make it back in their resting spots. More likely, you'll find them in my cup holders, on my dashboard, hanging from the wind shield, and nearly every other conspicuous place around my boat. Though I try hard to keep from getting stuck in a rut when it comes to lure selection, it seems that a handful of lures serve as my starting lineup throughout most of the fishing season. Here's a glance at Freewater's Top Five...

1 Chompers 4-inch Twin Tail Skirted Grub (Pumpkinseed)

When it comes to fishing on the bottom, around docks, through logs, over weed tops, and just about anywhere else, no bass is safe when you tie on one of these soft plastic jigs. These twin-tail bodies have a ton of action, a very soft texture, and one of the most potent scent formulas of any soft plastic that you can find. I think this lure in a pumpkinseed color is as close to a universal bass lure as I have ever found. With a plain wide-gap worm hook, you can crawl it over weeds and lily pads like a frog. On a light jig head, it makes a great swim jig for working over submerged weeds. On the bottom, it's hard to beat this bait paired up with a weedless football-style jig. This lure is one of the first out of my box almost all year round.



2 Action Airetail 4-inch Worm (Pumpkinseed)

There are floating worms, and then there are Action Airetail worms. These lures are not made of floating material, they literally have an air pocket molded into the tail. They have the ability to stand perfectly vertical on the bottom, even when rigged with a size 1 worm hook. This lure shines as a finesse presentation, particularly in the spring when bass are shallow and wary. On my home lake, tossing this lure under docks back in shallow boat canals regularly produces 30 or



more bass in a 2 hour trip. Like the Chompers grub, pumpkinseed seems to be the most versatile and effective color I've tried. Rig this bait with a size 2 weedless circle hook and a 1/8 oz. bullet sinker, and you're on your way to finesse fantasy land. The only down side to this lure is that they are difficult to track down, so when you do find a vender who stocks them, buy a bunch.

3 Bandit Lures Series 300 Crankbait (Tennessee Shad)

There are more brands and models of crankbaits than you can shake an Ugly Stick at. Prices can range from \$6 to over \$20 for these precision-crafted works of art. One spring, after losing a number of crankbaits to pike and gar, I thought I'd take a chance on the cheapest crankbait that I could find. Skeptically, I picked up a handful of \$4.99 Bandit 300 Series crankbaits and headed for the checkout lane. Looking back that was one of my most fortunate lure purchases in the last few years! These crankbaits have landed more fish than I can count and worked on nearly every lake that I've thrown them into. They cast well, retrieve dependably, troll precisely, and most of all, they catch fish. One of my best patterns on a new lake is to troll a pair of these along the weed edge in 10-12 feet of water. I've caught largemouth, smallmouth, sheephead, catfish, crappie, perch, white bass, pike, and even gar with this technique. Hats off to Bandit Lures...you guys have put together a fantastically effective little crankbait that doesn't break my bank account. Well done, guys, well done.



4 Bass Assassin 4-inch Shad (Arkansas Shiner)

Bass fishing experienced a soft-plastic jerk bait revolution in the 1990's, and the Bass Assassin helped to turn this trend into a tried and proven pattern. Rigged on a 2/0 worm hook, its erratic darting action triggers strikes from nearly all large gamefish. It can be worked quickly just beneath the surface to draw explosive strikes in shallow water. Insert a nail weight into the body, and you can cover deeper waters quickly as well. Cast it to docks, trees, rocks piles, and weed edges, allowing it to slowly sink to the bottom before lightly twitching, to tease reluctant fish. In waters with pike, add a steel leader and a stinger treble hook, and you're ready to do work on toothy predators. This lure delivered one of my most epic fishing experiences; more than 140 smallmouth bass in just 4 days fishing shorelines during the May catch-and-release season. From early spring to late fall, one of my rods always has a Bass Assassin tied on the end.



White 1/4 oz. Spinnerbait

5 I'm not sure who first came up with the idea of putting a skirt and blades on a safety-pin looking harness., but I'm sure glad they did. Few lures produce cool water bass better than a 1/4 oz. spinnerbait. You can fish it quickly, just below the surface. You can slowly crawl it along weed edges. You can even let it helicopter down along vertical structures, like docks, trees, and bridge pilings. I made a point to not list a particular brand or spinner configuration, because,



honestly I've tried several and they all seem to work. I don't know that I've ever found what I would call a "perfect" spinnerbait. If I did, it would have a Colorado blade followed by a willow blade on top. The line tie would not be open, but would have a twist so that I could also use the snaps on my steel leaders when fishing for pike. (If the spinnerbait has an open line tie, you can take a small piece of monofilament line and tie a knot to close it off).



The skirt would consist of a one-piece silicone body with a collar to hold it on the hook. This make is much easier to change skirts than baits with the skirts consisting of individual rubber strands held together with a rubber band. Another key component would be a stinger hook with a twister tail hook threaded on it. This would constitute what I would call, "the perfect spinnerbait".

This constitutes the Freewater's Top 5 Lures list. Add these to your fishing arsenal and see if they don't work their way into your own starting lineup.