

Early Summer Pike

by Gord Ellis for Wilderness North

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Early summer is a great time of year to be on the water. If you're a pike angler, or are interested in becoming one, the early summer period provides a great chance to catch a real monster. Let's face it no matter what you think of them, there are few fish more explosive on rod and line than a 20 pound pike. Here are just a few tips to help you become a Pike Master this summer.



Tip 1 - Think Shallow - Early spring sees many pike up in the shallows spawning, but by the end of May the really big fish are back in the depths. However, as the weeds come up and forage fish like suckers, shiners and perch get active, trophy pike return to the shallows. They may not be in the very backs of bays, but they are often in less than ten feet of water. Look for big hawks to be hanging out near the mouths of bays, adjacent to the first drop off. Trophy pike also like to set up shop on shallow rock piles not far from deep water. Here they snack on walleye, suckers and bass. River mouths are also a great place to catch big pike, especially when the walleye and bass start to make evening migrations into the current.

Tip 2 - Look for Weeds AND Rocks - Most of us probably know that pike like weeds. The green and cream mottled side of a pike is really just weed camouflage. Pike like to sit motionless in weed beds and ambush prey that happens to swim by. Weeds that are associated with reefs or boulder beds consistently give up larger fish than weed without rocks. Rocky reefs are home to bass, walleye and perch, while weeds provide cover for those species and various types of minnows. Put a reef and a weedbed together and you have the perfect mix of habitat for pike. However, this type of situation is not easily found. Because the best reefs with weeds are often out of sight, many are not touched by the majority of pike anglers. It should be no surprise that walleye anglers often catch trophy pike; they fish the rock and weed stuff regularly. Pike are where the food is. The more and larger the amount of food, the better a pike likes it.

Tip 3 - Who You Calling a Jerk? - The jerk-bait family is a wide one, and includes wooden baits like the Suick, Reef Hawg, Ernie and Smitty bait, and an ever-growing number of plastic baits such as the Sledge. Throwing jerk-baits is perhaps the most efficient way of getting a big early summer pike to hit. Some jerk-baits can be bought in sizes up to 12 inches, but for pike, I'd stick with about a 6-inch lure. Even the largest pike seem more interested in "smaller" lures than do similar sized muskie. There is no real action to a jerk-bait, hence the name. To make the jerk-bait come alive, you need to impart action. The flat-bodied baits like the Suick need to be fished with a downward chop-stop action. Pop your rod down, reel up some slack and pop it again. The Suick should dive down about 5 feet. Weighted lures will get deeper. The rounded, baseball bat shape lures like the Reef Hawg can be fished with a snappy, downward rod action as well, but they will roll from side to side. The slow rolling over action of these "glide baits" is great in cool water and over reefs. You really need to set the hooks on all jerk-baits as pike will often clamp down and hold on, even when they aren't hooked.

Tip 4 - Don't Forget Spoons - While there are many great ways to catch pike, spoons still top the list. Spoons are especially deadly in the early summer, when the water has warmed enough to get the metabolism of the pike high. The throb and wobble of a spoon is the most appealing action to a pike on the prowl. You can either cast or troll a spoon; both ways work equally well. Use lighter weight, large bodied spoons in shallow water, heavier spoons in deeper stuff. Weedless spoons like the Johnson Silver Minnow are great when the pike are buried in the cabbage. Weedless spoons are also a good choice for kids who invariably throw their lures into the thickest tangles. Silver bellied pike spoons are the choice on sunny days, brass on the darker days. As for spoon colour, yellow/five of diamonds, black/white, hot orange/gold and firetiger are all good choices. The classic red and white Eppinger Daredevil spoon is still the all time classic pike killer.

Tip 5 - Steel Leaders - You need to use a steel leader when you fish specifically for pike. The reason for using a steel leader is this: the shape of a pike's teeth allow them to cut through monofilament and braided line like scissors. You might not lose every pike without a steel leader, but I can assure you, you will get a bite off sooner or later. Usually this occurs when you are using the only lure that is catching fish. Steel leaders for pike need to be well made and have a decent clasp. I've seen cheap steel leaders open up like a like an advertising executive at the Gomery Inquiry. This is not a pretty sight. You truly get what you pay for with steel leaders. A steel leader of about a foot in length will do for most pike fishing situations. If you are trolling, an 18-inch leader may be a better choice, as pike have a bad habit of rolling themselves up in the leader. A longer leader will reduce the chance of them cutting the line on a roll.

Tip 6 - Don't Rush a Big Pike In - So you've hooked a big pike. Maybe you were fishing for it, maybe not. But it's a big one and you want to land it. The biggest mistake people make with big pike is to try and rush the fish into the boat. If you try to land a big pike when it's green, as often as not that fish will make a power run at boat side and break off. Happens time after time every year. The fact is big pike are often very docile until they get right up to the boat. I've had huge pike come in like logs, giving the impression they aren't going to fight. Then they let loose. Always assume there are several good power surges in every gator and don't try to net or hand land a fish early. Let it tire out. Then net or grab it under the jaw and bring it in. If you put a big pike that's still "green" into a boat, you will pay a price. Tackle boxes will go flying, hooks will be buried in bad places and you might even capsize a smaller boat. Don't rush a big pike. Take your time landing it.

Good luck this summer with your pike fishing. And consider letting the big fish go. We need them for the future.



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Wilderness North

Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada

Phone toll free: 888-465-3474

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