



FALL 2026 EDITION

JASON MITCHELL'S COMPLETE GUIDE TO

FALL WALLEYE FISHING

How fall walleyes move from September to ice-up, where to find them, and the baits I rely on to catch them.

FREE GUIDE

FROM JASON

FALL MIGHT BE MY FAVORITE TIME TO TARGET WALLEYES

Fall might be my favorite time of the entire open-water season to target walleyes.

The crowds disappear. The fish are feeding. Big walleyes become increasingly vulnerable, and some of the best fishing of the year can happen when most anglers have already put their boats away.

Fall walleye fishing can also be confusing.

One of the biggest mistakes anglers make is treating “fall” like it’s one season. September and November can be completely different. Water temperatures are changing rapidly, forage is moving and walleyes can transition through several completely different patterns before ice-up.

Some days the fish are scattered everywhere. A few weeks later, those same fish might be stacked on one small piece of structure.

Understanding that progression is one of the biggest keys to consistently catching fall walleyes.

WHAT’S INSIDE

- | | |
|----|--------------------------|
| 01 | THE PROGRESSION |
| 02 | EARLY FALL & ELECTRONICS |
| 03 | GREEN WEEDS |
| 04 | CURRENT |
| 05 | ROCK |
| 06 | DEPTH & TIMING |
| 07 | BIG FOOD |
| 08 | PRESENTATIONS |

01 • THE BIG PICTURE

THINK OF FALL AS A PROGRESSION

01

Instead of looking at the calendar, pay attention to what is happening in the water.

Early fall often resembles late summer. Water temperatures can still be relatively warm and fish may be scattered across several patterns.

As the water cools, those patterns start becoming more defined.

By late fall, some of the best locations can become incredibly predictable.

If I could simplify the progression, I would describe it this way:

1**EARLY FALL**

Cover water and hunt.

2**MID FALL**

Follow forage and concentrate on current, rock and healthy weeds.

3**LATE FALL**

Fish increasingly specific locations and slow down when necessary.

// That basic understanding can eliminate a tremendous amount of unproductive water.

02 • EARLY FALL

SEPTEMBER: KEEP MOVING

02

September can be frustrating.

You can find walleyes shallow and deep. Fish can be suspended. Fish can be relating to weeds, rocks, points or offshore structure. There are often several different things happening simultaneously.

Warm weather can make this even more pronounced.

When water temperatures remain warm or begin climbing for several consecutive days, I've often found that fish become increasingly scattered. Instead of trying to force one pattern, I want to cover water.

This is where a milk-run mentality becomes valuable.

Identify a collection of high-percentage locations and move through them. Catch a fish or two and move. If you don't see what you want, leave.

// Don't spend three hours trying to make one spot happen simply because it was good yesterday.

Early fall is often more about the process of finding fish than finding one magical location.

02 • EARLY FALL, CONTINUED

USE ELECTRONICS TO ELIMINATE WATER

02

Modern electronics can make this process much more efficient.

Traditional sonar, side imaging and forward-facing sonar can all help determine whether fish are using a location before you invest much time fishing it.

But electronics are only valuable when you understand where to look.

USE YOUR MAPPING TO IDENTIFY

- Weed edges and irregularities
- Points and inside turns
- Sharp breaks and rock transitions
- Saddles, humps and reefs
- Current areas and pinch points
- Subtle contour changes

Then use your electronics to dissect those locations.

// Don't just look for fish. Look for life.

Baitfish, perch, shiners and other forage can be every bit as important as seeing walleyes themselves.

JASON'S PICK • FORWARD-FACING SONAR

NORTHLAND TUNGSTEN STAND UP

Forward-facing sonar has added another dimension to this process. Once I identify individual fish away from the boat, I can make very precise casts instead of simply fishing through the general area. A compact tungsten stand-up jig is particularly effective for this style of fishing because it gets down quickly and is easy to track as you bring the presentation to an individual fish.

[SHOP THE JIG →](#)

03 • EARLY FALL PATTERN

GREEN WEEDS: THE FALL CONSTANT

03

If there's one pattern I continue returning to during the early stages of fall, it's weeds.

Healthy vegetation can provide tremendous stability during a period when everything else seems to be changing.

The key word is healthy.

As fall progresses, vegetation begins dying. Brown, slimy vegetation usually becomes less attractive. The remaining vibrant green weeds can become fish magnets.

Cabbage is probably my favorite, but coontail, milfoil, sago pondweed and other healthy vegetation can all hold walleyes.

DON'T JUST FISH "THE WEEDS"

A huge weed bed can be overwhelming. Break it down. Look for:

- Outside edges
- Points and inside turns
- Pockets and openings
- Changes in weed type
- The top edge of the vegetation

One mistake anglers make is spending too much time fishing directly through the thickest weeds.

// Think about the clean edge. That clean lane along the edge can be the highway the walleyes are actually using.



JASON'S PICK • WEED EDGES

NORTHLAND EYE CANDY PADDLE SHAD

Paddle tails are one of my favorite ways to work these areas because you can cover water efficiently while keeping the bait just above or alongside the vegetation.

[SHOP THE PADDLE SHAD →](#)

04 • MID FALL PATTERN

CURRENT CONCENTRATES FOOD

04

If I had to identify one environmental feature that becomes increasingly important as fall progresses, current would be near the top of the list.

Shiners and other minnows often migrate toward moving water as temperatures fall, and walleyes follow.

Current doesn't necessarily mean fishing a river. Look for:

- Incoming creeks
- River mouths
- Bridges
- Causeways
- Culverts
- Pinch points between islands
- Narrows
- Bottlenecks
- Reservoir channels

Pay particular attention when current intersects another piece of structure.

BETTER

Current plus a sharp break is better than just current.

BETTER YET

Current plus rock can be better yet.

The strongest current isn't necessarily the best location either.

Walleyes frequently position along current seams, eddies and edges where they can hold without fighting the full force of the moving water.

// Find the places where walleyes can sit efficiently while food gets delivered to them.

05 • MID TO LATE FALL

ROCK GETS BETTER AS FALL PROGRESSES

05

Rock holds walleyes throughout the open-water season, but it can become increasingly important as temperatures decline.

The mistake is assuming all rock is equal. **Look for character.** A giant featureless rock flat can certainly hold fish, but I'm usually more interested in something different within that rock.

MAYBE IT'S A

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| - Boulder field | - Sharp drop |
| - Point | - Small hump |
| - Finger | - Saddle |
| - Shelf | - Rock to sand or mud |

The smaller and more specific these features become, the more tightly fish can concentrate. This becomes increasingly important during late fall.



WHEN FISH ARE SPREAD OUT

NORTHLAND PITCHIN' PUPPET

When fish are spread across larger rock structures, a glide bait such as a Pitchin' Puppet is a great way to cover water while maintaining contact with the bottom.

[SHOP THE PUPPET →](#)

WHEN FISH STACK UP

NORTHLAND DEEP-V JIG

As the fish become more concentrated and I can stay directly over them, I'll often transition to a more traditional vertical presentation with a Deep-V Jig and minnow.

[SHOP THE DEEP-V →](#)

06 • DEPTH & TIMING

DON'T AUTOMATICALLY GO DEEP

One of the biggest misconceptions about fall walleye fishing is that colder water automatically pushes every fish deep. It doesn't.

There can certainly be tremendous deep-water bites during fall, but walleyes can remain surprisingly shallow right up until ice-up.

- Healthy weeds can hold shallow fish.
- Wind-blown rock can hold shallow fish.
- Current can pull fish shallow.
- Forage can pull fish shallow.

Some of the largest walleyes in a lake can be caught in surprisingly shallow water during late fall. Instead of starting with a preconceived depth, let the fish tell you where they are.

AFTERNOONS CAN BE BETTER THAN MORNINGS

Fall walleye fishing doesn't always reward the angler who launches at daylight.

As nights become colder, shallow water can cool dramatically overnight. A sunny afternoon can increase that shallow-water temperature by just a few degrees, but that small change can have a tremendous effect on fish activity.

I've experienced many fall days where the morning was painfully slow and the fishing became progressively better through the afternoon. This can be especially noticeable around shallow weeds and rock.

49° → 52°

Pay attention to your water temperature. A move from 49 degrees to 52 degrees might not seem significant, but the walleyes may disagree. During cold weather, the warmest portion of the day can sometimes produce the best shallow-water bite.

07 • PROFILE

FALL WALLEYES LIKE BIG FOOD

There's an old rule about using bigger baits during fall, and there's a lot of truth to it.

Think about what has happened to the forage since spring. Young-of-the-year perch, shiners and other baitfish have spent the entire summer growing. The average meal available to a walleye is simply larger.

That doesn't mean a walleye won't eat a small bait, but fall is a great time to experiment with larger profiles. Bigger paddle tails, glide baits, crankbaits, stickbaits, creek chubs and minnows can all shine.

Even when jigging with minnows, there are situations where I'll use two minnows simply to increase the profile.

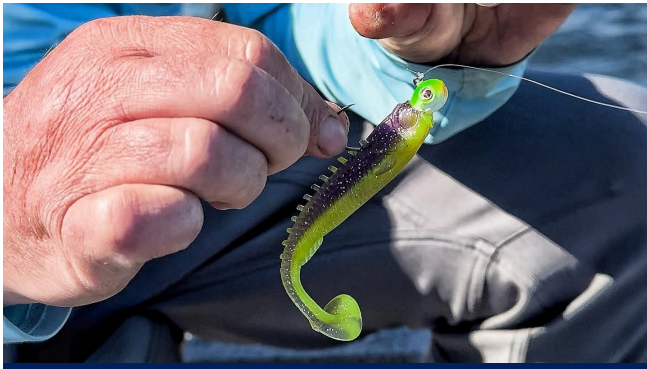
// Don't be afraid to show a fall walleye a substantial meal.

08 • PRESENTATIONS

THE BEST FALL WALLEYE PRESENTATIONS

08

There isn't one lure that dominates the entire fall because fish behavior changes dramatically throughout the season.



SWIMBAITS & PADDLE TAILS

Swimbaits are incredibly versatile during fall. They work around weeds, shallow rock, current, points and deeper structure. They also allow you to cover water.

For shallow weed fish, cast beyond the target and retrieve the bait over the top or alongside the vegetation. Around rock, experiment with letting the bait contact bottom.

A steady retrieve can be deadly, but don't overlook pauses and changes in speed.

[SHOP THE PADDLE SHAD →](#)



GLIDE BAITS

Glide baits have become one of the most effective ways to trigger fall walleyes.

A bait like the Pitchin' Puppet allows you to fish quickly while still maintaining excellent depth control, making it especially effective around deep rock, points, humps and sharp breaks.

The biggest mistake is assuming you always have to snap a glide bait aggressively. Experiment. Some days the fish want that bait ripped hard. Other days a shorter lift followed by a controlled fall catches more fish.

[SHOP THE PUPPET →](#)

08 • PRESENTATIONS, CONTINUED

CRANKBAITS & VERTICAL JIGGING

08

CRANKBAITS

When fish are scattered, crankbaits are difficult to beat.

Trolling allows you to search enormous amounts of water while determining productive depth, speed and lure profile.

As water gets colder, don't automatically assume faster is better.

Use your turns to experiment. The outside bait speeds up while the inside bait slows down.

If fish consistently hit one side of the boat, they're telling you something about the speed they want.

[SHOP CRANKBAITS →](#)

VERTICAL JIGGING

When walleyes begin stacking tightly on deeper rock, vertical jigging becomes incredibly efficient.

This is where a Deep-V Jig tipped with a good-sized minnow is hard to beat.

Use your electronics to stay directly over the fish and keep the presentation close to bottom.

During colder water, less movement can often produce more fish. Lift the jig several inches and hold it. Drag it slightly. Hover it just above the rocks.

[SHOP THE DEEP-V →](#)

// The objective is precision.

08 • PRESENTATIONS, CONTINUED

CASTING WITH FORWARD-FACING SONAR

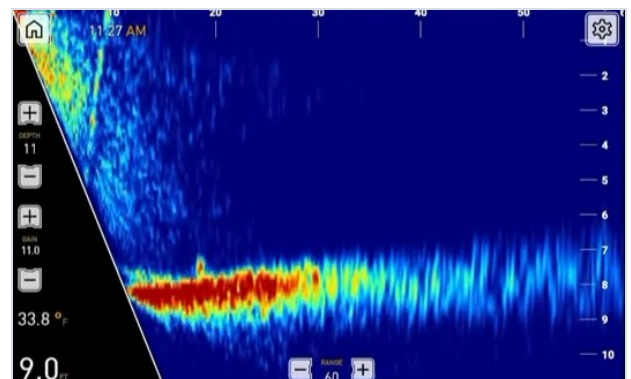
08

Forward-facing sonar has changed how I fish walleyes that aren't directly beneath the boat.

When I can see an individual fish, I want a presentation I can put on that fish quickly and accurately.

A tungsten stand-up jig works extremely well for this because tungsten provides plenty of weight in a compact package. I can cast beyond the fish, get down quickly and watch how the fish responds.

That's where FFS becomes particularly valuable.



Forward-facing sonar in action.

FISH CHARGES

If the fish charges the bait, I might speed it up.

FISH FOLLOWS

If the fish follows without committing, I can slow down.

FISH DROPS

If the fish drops toward bottom, I can let the jig settle and almost hold it in place.

Instead of guessing what the walleyes want, you can watch them tell you.



JASON'S PICK • FFS CASTING

NORTHLAND TUNGSTEN STAND UP

[SHOP THE JIG →](#)

08 • PRESENTATIONS, CONTINUED

THE CLASSIC JIG AND MINNOW

The jig and minnow is still a fall staple.

I'd argue jig-and-minnow combos have caught more fall walleyes across more fisheries than any other presentation. On many fisheries, we catch a lot of walleyes by simply vertical jigging under the boat with a jig and minnow.

Almost anything can still work in the fall. Leeches are hard to find but can be deadly. Early in the season, a half crawler on a jig can perform well. As fall progresses, minnows become more reliable.

BULK UP AS THE WATER COOLS

- Big shiners
- Rainbows
- Fatheads, doubled up two to a jig
- Small suckers, creek chubs or redbtails to cast at fish
- Soft plastics to bulk up the profile

Bigger minnows all work better in bulk. With fatheads, I'll often double up two minnows on the jig to create a fuller presentation.



JASON'S PICK • JIG AND MINNOW

NORTHLAND DEEP-V JIG

I love the Deep-Vee Jig for vertical jigging because its pill-shaped head works through rock better and its long shank hook is great for double-hooking larger minnows. The hook also files well, which is a big advantage in rocky areas.

[SHOP THE DEEP-V →](#)

// Fall is all about big profiles, sharp hooks and being ready to adjust as conditions change.



DON'T PUT THE BOAT AWAY. SEE YOU OUT THERE.

Everything in this guide is what I tie on from September to ice-up. Grab what fits how you fish and get after it this fall.

[SHOP THE FULL GEAR LIST →](#)

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