




JOHN CREWS

**FLIPPING
SPAWN**



The spawn is here. Flowers are blooming. Birds are lively and building nests. So are the bass. So does that mean sight fishing? Not so fast. We have established that the bass are shallow and spawning but that does not mean you have to sight fish. There is a way to alter the way you flip and pitch during the spawn for awesome results.

Your basic flipping and pitching techniques can catch fish during the spawn but altering what you look for, what you fish, and how you fish it will make your spring days on the water very fun. Over the years, I have noticed various characteristics that fish do during the spawn. Once you understand them it is game on.

Many years ago when I went to Lake Okeechobee, the fish were spawning. Everyone knew it. Very few people were actually sight fishing. The common thing to do was to pitch a big worm in the eelgrass holes. The fish would create the holes when they created their nests. It did not take long to figure out that the most successful anglers left their worm in a hole for a long time before moving it. The result is that they caught more fish by leaving their worm in the bed a long time. This is characteristic number one.

During most of the rest of the year, many fish will hit your bait as it falls fast. When pitching and flipping, most anglers know this. The difference during the spawn is that the fish are mostly on the bottom. The fish are either guarding the nests or getting ready to lay eggs. They are territorial. A lure needs to get in their nest area and stay there. That is the best way to provoke a bite.

You have to be prepared to throw the right bait and use the right tackle. The Pinnacle Perfecta 7'6" flipping stick is the perfect rod for flipping anytime and especially during the spawn. A high speed reel is a must so I use the Pinnacle Optimus XiHS with a 7:1 gear ratio. The rod and reel balance very well together. I highly recommend using a quality flipping stick and reel for this set up because you will use it quite a bit during the spawn and throughout the year.

There are various baits for specific times during the spawn. If I had to choose one, it would definitely be the Missile Baits D Bomb. It is a 4.5" bulky bait that sails when it falls. When you pump it or reel it fast, the flappers go wild. It is soft so you get a great hook set but it is thick enough so that you don't get hung up all the time. My favorite part of this bait is when it is on the bottom.

Once you throw it in, let it hit the bottom. The flappers and side claws move and shimmer with the slightest twitch of the rod. After the bait has done it's thing, that is when the bass pick it up.

During my youth, I used to fish a lake that straddles the Virginia and North Carolina border called Buggs Island. It is a well-known lake that has had many pro tournaments on it. I will never forget an event one year in April that Denny Brauer won. He was flipping flooded bushes but not with his famous 1/2 ounce jig. He was using a 3/16-ounce weight Texas rigged in front of a 6" lizard. This was quite a shock for him to do this. He said that bass during the spawn liked a slower fall. I have and never forgotten that.

Denny's observation that led to his win is one that has seen to be true in most cases. There are certain exceptions. Denny won getting bites on the fall of the bait into the cover. The exception is one I like at times. A heavier weight on the bait gets to the bottom and stays there. It disturbs the bed and knocks around on the bottom. It provokes bites that a light weight does not. The best way to fish this time of year is to have a rod with a light weight and a rod with a heavier weight.

Knowing that the flip bite is different, you need to know what kinds of places are best to flip. Think protected areas with hard bottom. Isolated cover is best but thicker cover can be good too. An ideal scenario would be to go into a creek and see an L shaped pocket off of it. In the back of the L would be an isolated piece of cover such as a bush, laydown, or cypress tree in 2 to 4 feet of water. The water is going to be quiet and not subject to waves or boat wakes. The bottom around hard cover is usually also hard so the bass can make productive beds.

During the 2011 B.A.S.S. Elite Series event on Pickwick Lake in Alabama happened to be right around the bass spawn in April.

The lake was still up from spring rains so there was plenty of shoreline cover in the water. I took my light and heavy flipping show on the road. The heavy weight was better that week. The fish definitely wanted that weight knocking around the cypress and bush bases. Picking off bass from the best looking isolated cover in spawning type pockets was the way for me to finish in the top 30.

The spawn does not have to be a sight-fishing bonanza. Use the conditions that make it right and go flipping during the spawn. Find the dirtier water with the shallow cover. Make sure the areas you are seeking are protected at least in part. Take that Missile Baits D Bomb and put it where they live and work it how they want it during this fun time of year to be fishing.



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