

## Smallmouth Basics - Jigs

by Norm Minas aka Creekyknees

For the beginning river angler the multitude of jig types can lead to confusion. Is there a best one and if so what is it? If you asked myself, and any two other anglers you would get three different answers, yet we would all catch fish. I hope that nobody comes away with the impression that what works for me is the best way and it definitely is not the only way.

My favorite jig is the weighted keeper hook that is made by Mr. Twister. It is a hook with a wire arm with barbs on it attached to the hook eye by a loop in the wire arm. It has lead molded around the shank of the hook. There is a newer version of this hook with a corkscrew shaped piece of metal in place of the wire arm. It was intended to be used with the Exude plastics. I don't use this style because of rust problems with the metal arm.



For me, this has been the most snag resistant jig that I have used. There is no such thing as a snagproof jig, gravity and current will see to that. What makes this jig work well, in my opinion is its design. The placement of the lead on the shank acts as a keel which keeps the amount of tumbling in the current to a minimum. It also helps the jig come over the top of the rocks rather than digging into the crevices as much. It works on a more horizontal plane which I feel keeps it closer to the bottom and more in the strike zone. The only drawback to this jig is the heavier gauge wire the hook is made of. You need a rod with some backbone to drive home the hook, I prefer a rod with medium action. You also need to use heavier line, 8 lb test at minimum, I prefer 10 lb test. The lighter the line you use, the more it will snap on the hookset. You will also miss more fish as it does not have the power to drive the heavy metal into the hard roof of the fishes mouth.

To rig your favorite soft plastic on this jig, stick the barbed wire into the head of your plastic and the hook as far back into the plastic as you can while still having the plastic hang straight. The only plastic that I would recommend a different style of head is a tube. You can make it work by inserting the wire into the nose of the tube and skin hooking the side. There are, however, much more efficient ways to fish a tube.

For tubes, there are probably as many tube insert style jigs as there are companies. Choose one that has an eye big enough to come thru the tube and a hook long enough to reach the end of your tube. I am currently using a ballhead jig with a 3/0 hook on my larger tubes with a wider body cavity. If I am going to fish a tube with the jighead on the outside than I will use either a Kalin's Darter Head or a Charlie Brewer Classic Spider Head jig.



I will use the Kalin's Darter Head on twister tail and minnow shaped {Sassy Shad, etc.} type plastics. I prefer this type of head and these plastics when I am using a swimming type retrieve that mimics a minnow. I fish it with the hook totally exposed at the top as it is not making as much bottom contact and therefore less prone to snagging.



I use the Charlie Brewer Classic Spider Head jigs for two other types of presentations other than with the tubes. I use them for the finesse style of fishing for which they were designed and work so wonderfully for. I'll combo them with small finesse and dropshot style worms, plastic leeches, small reapers and Case hellgramites. When used with these types of plastics, I use the slow and deliberate retrieve that has been dubbed "polishing the rocks". I also use them with the tube crawl type plastic as this type of head fishes a little more vertically. This allows the crawl to sit up in the classic defensive posture when at rest.

Please remember, this is not meant to be taken as the final word in jig fishing in rivers. It is just what has worked for me over the years on my river . On a different type of river and especially in creeks there are other types of jigs that work quite well. The best way to learn what works where you fish is to experiment with different types in different conditions. The smallies will be the final judge of what works in your watershed.