

Hair Stinging Erie Walleyes

Bucktail jigs kick butt for spawners on the reefs. *By Tom Straus With Dave Mull*



Purple is the color of choice 90 percent of the time. The critical stinger hook should extend beyond the bucktail.

From ice out until the spawn is over—usually the second week in May—there may be no better rig for limits of Erie walleyes than the simple hair jig—as long as it has a stinger hook.

Ninety-two percent of the fish in the lake spawn on Western Basin Reefs. We start as soon as we can get the boats in on the deeper reefs—Niagara and Round, for example, and as the weather warms, we head right up on the beach, drifting in eight, sometimes as little as seven feet of water.

I almost always use a 3/4- or 5/8-ounce jig. If rock fishing, I'm probably using a half-ounce for drifting across the rocks with little wind, to keep from constantly snagging. The standard rig is a 6 1/2-foot spinning rod and reel spooled with 8- to 10-pound test Power Pro with a 14-inch leader of 20-pound test Stren monofilament attached with a double uni knot. The monofilament leader is thicker and allows the jig to sink a bit more slowly than it would with straight braided line.

A slow drop is important because most of the strikes come as the jig is falling. The no-stretch Power Pro lets you detect the subtle strike—and get a great hookset.

Purple is my best jig color—I use it 90 percent of the time. A lot of guys like black or John Deere green. Every once in awhile I tie on a light blue jig. Early in April when the water is real cold we tip the jigs with a fathead minnow when we can buy 'em; an emerald shiner if they're not available. Happy Hooker, the tackle store closest to my home base in Oak Harbor, Ohio, usually has fatheads. As the water warms and the fish get a little more aggressive, bait isn't necessary.

What is *absolutely* necessary is a stinger hook—many days almost all the fish are hooked on it. I make my own with a Gamakatsu, No. 8 treble and 30-pound test Big Game. I use No. 2 leader sleeves to crimp the hook on one end of the leader and a No. 2 split ring (I get both from Jann's Netcraft, jannsnecraft.com). I dip the split ring end in Plasti Grip,

which is a rubberized material you can get in hardware stores—it's used for coating pliers handles and the like. The split ring, coated with the dry rubber, goes right over the hook on the jig. I like using the stiff, 30-pound test line because it doesn't get tangled in the hair and because it can stand up to a lot of toothy walleyes before you have to replace it. The stinger is about 1 1/2 inches long when it's crimped—you want it sticking out just behind the bucktail fur.

Jig action is extremely critical day to day. This is usually a drift-fishing technique, although when other boats aren't trying to fish an area—usually on the deeper reefs early in the year—we anchor on the edge and fish vertically. We're still pretty vertical when drifting—we don't want the line angling more than 60 degrees over the side of the boat. We just lower the jig to the bottom and maintain bottom contact, popping it up, and then, let it sink back to the bottom, maintaining contact. Sometimes the fish want a hard, high pop of the jig off the bottom; sometimes they want a more subtle pull off the bottom. Always be expecting and feeling for a strike while the jig settles back towards the bottom and be ready to set the hook with authority! [GLA](#)



The stinger ends up being about 1 1/2 inches long after crimping the No. 8 Gamakatsu treble on one end and the No. 2 split ring on the other. No. 2 leader sleeves do the job. Thirty-pound test Trilene is stiff enough to avoid tangling with the fur and to extend the hook back. It also holds up to walleye teeth. Note the split ring is dipped in Plasti Grip to keep it in position on the jig's hook. All the materials for making your own stinger hooks are available at Jann's Netcraft, 800-NETCRAFT; jannsnecraft.com)

Capt. Tom Straus, Erie Drifter Charters, has fished Lake Erie for more than 25 years. To book a charter, contact him at 419-349-1129.

For live bait and current fishing information on Erie's Western Basin near Oak Harbor, contact Happy Hooker Bait Shop, 419-898-9676; happyhookerbaitandtackle.com.

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