

## **“FINESSE” PLASTIC FISHIN’**

By TubeDude

There is one special technique that can definitely improve your walleye success ratio. This involves mostly the use of plastics, rather than spoons, spinners or “hard baits”. Plastic grubs, tubes and twisters...and some “swim baits”...are overwhelmingly the lures of choice for most consistently successful walleye anglers on Utah Lake. There are plenty of ‘eyes taken on all the other stuff. But for “finesse” fishing you can’t beat a well-presented piece of plastic.

The most successful walleye anglers on Utah Lake typically use a fairly light spinning outfit. The rod should be anywhere from 5 1/2 to 7 feet, with a fast tip. You can use anything from light to medium action...with medium light being a good choice for most plastics. It is a matter of feel and personal preference. Reels should be small and light, with good drag and capable of fishing line from 4# to 8# test. I usually fish 6#. It is light enough to cast well, with light jigs, but strong enough to set the hook in big fish and to help save most of my snagged lures. Most importantly, the reel should be ultra smooth so that you can concentrate on the feel of the jig and not be distracted by a stiff or balky retrieve.

The choice of line is one area in which you do not want to buy the cheapest you can find. Line for casting jigs in rocky areas for walleyes should be both strong and flexible. It should have good knot strength and good abrasion resistance. Getting pulled through rocks and stickups and being chewed on by toothy walleyes requires that your line can take some abuse. There are lots of good new lines on the market these days. The better quality you put on your reel spool the more enjoyment you will get from your fishing and the more walleyes you are likely to hook...and bring to net.

You will usually need to make longer casts if you are shore bound or wading than if you are afloat in a boat, tube or ‘toon. However, it is not uncommon for the fish to cruise within easy casting distance from shore and many walleye chasers cast too far and “wash lures” in fishless water a high percentage of the time. If you are casting out a long ways, but most of your strikes are coming within a few feet of shore, try casting more parallel to the shore, in the same zone or depth where you are getting bit most often.

Once you locate a holding area, either while wading or afloat, position yourself far enough away to minimize spooking the fish, but close enough for easy casting and control. The shorter the casts you make the greater the accuracy and the feel you will have while retrieving your lure. While walleyes sometimes chomp fiercely on the lure, they often simply swim up and take hold of it. You detect only a slight “back pressure”, also described as a “rubber band” feel.

That’s why it is important to have light well-balanced tackle that allows you to feel everything that is going on at the business end of your line. You must be prepared to strike whenever there is a “change in the force”. The other fishermen around you might laugh at your “whiffs” but when you are the only one hooking fish you can laugh back at them.

Focus and concentration are key elements for maximizing your catch of walleyes. Once you have the right tackle that allows you to cast and retrieve effortlessly and to maintain your full attention to your lure you are better prepared for getting serious. Focus on the difference in the way different lures are acting on the retrieve. You can actually feel the variations in the depths they run and how the actions differ with other sizes and designs on the vibrating tails.

**You must fish every cast with positive expectation that a fish will interrupt your retrieve at any second, regardless of what has happened on your previous 100 casts. If your mind is wandering when you get an “inquiry” you give the fish time to spit out the fake food before you set the hook. Sometimes the only indication of a taker is the sudden stop of the vibration of the lure ...with no detectable strike. If you are not paying attention you might just keep reeling until the fish (which has been swimming toward you, along with your lure) simply opens its mouth and releases your lure. You completely missed an opportunity because you were bored or distracted.**

**Something I suggest to walleye “newbies” is to fish with a “cocked” wrist. Make the cast and then lock your wrist in one position...letting the reel do the work. Don’t use the rod tip to add any additional motion. Reel slowly and steadily, keeping the wrist cocked and ready for an instant hook-set. Turn the reel handle just fast enough to keep the plastic running slightly above the bottom.**

**It is important that you not only maintain total feel of the rod, reel, line and lure, but that you watch the line and the rod tip too. Sometimes the line will just give a slight twitch, where it enters the water. At other times, the visible vibrations on the rod will suddenly stop and the tip will dip just a little. You don’t always feel these things. You must watch carefully for them and if you do not react and set the hook you just released a fish without the fun of the fight. HOOKSETS ARE FREE.**

**Mastering feel, finesse and technique is more important than which size, shape and color of plastic you throw. Remember, good fisherman can catch fish on the “wrong” lures...but poor fishermen often cannot catch fish on the “hot” lures. That being said, there is a lot of both art and science in putting together a good lure box for walleyes.**

**Since we have been discussing plastics let’s talk about colors for both plastics and jig heads. A good generalized statement would be that visibility is more important than using an exact shade of a certain color. Even though walleyes can see shapes in the dark they cannot always see colors well enough to differentiate them. Only in clear water and good light can subtle color shades have a noticeable effect on walleye acceptance.**

**Utah Lake is not famous for having clear water. But, when water levels are up and there has not been any significant wind for a few days the lake sometimes becomes more green than brown...and visibility can be measured in feet instead of inches. On those days solid colors can be more effective than bright contrasting colors.**

**Good solid colors are white, black, purple, and chartreuse. Sometimes a motor oil or brown color can work well too. All of these can give off light waves in the same spectrums as natural food in the lake...leeches, worms, crawdads, small catfish and the lighter colored species, like white bass or crappie fry.**

**If the lake is in a more typical “murky” condition solid dark colors like black or purple can still work well. However, rigging them on a high visibility head can help. Try using dark red, hot red, orange or pink heads. Or, you can use black, purple or red heads with high-vis chartreuse eyes. Eyes can add a lot to the effectiveness of almost any jig, of any color, in any water condition.**

**Much of the best finesse plastic fishing for walleyes on Utah Lake is done during the fall and/or spring. The water is comfortably cooler than peak high summer temps and is usually somewhat clouded by seasonal breezes. During these “transition times” of the year, there is traditionally more wind, which keeps the water stirred up.**

When the water is cold and cloudy, that's when you tie on brightly colored two-tone plastics, with contrasting colored jig heads. The fish move more slowly in colder water and they will not chase faster moving lures. You need to serve something that they can see well and which moves slowly enough to trigger a strike.

Most of the regulars on Utah Lake favor plastics that combine a dark colored body with a tail of chartreuse, for contrast and visibility. Black and chartreuse is among the most contrasting and visible combinations for cold murky water. However, almost any other dark color together with chartreuse will work. Other popular main body colors are smoke, purple, blue, watermelon, orange and red. Black and white combos can also be effective, as can orange and white, chartreuse and white, pink and white, etc.



Almost any color plastic will work for walleyes if fished in the right place...the right way. Here are some of my favorite two-tones...and the basic clear sparkle tail I begin with, before dyeing them. From the left...orange/chartreuse, red/chartreuse, purple chartreuse, junebug/chartreuse and black/chartreuse.

Some of these colors can be purchased from tackle manufacturers or retailers. Some of the more exotic combos must be made to order...either by the angler or someone with the materials and know-how to do the job. A few of the Utah Lake walleye crowd actually "hybridize" their own combo plastics. They buy packages of two different colors...say one of solid purple and one of chartreuse...solid or sparkle. Then, they cut the tails off one and the thick front parts off the other, and then weld them together. It is not difficult, if you have either an electric hot plate or a small burner. The idea is to hold the ends of both pieces to be joined over the heat...or touch them to the burner...and then join and hold them until the softened plastic hardens, heat welding the two different colors together. You can also use special plastic glues...a type of super glue especially formulated for gluing soft plastics together.

I have a couple of custom made hybrid colors that I use in Utah Lake more than any other colors. One is bright red glitter body with a chartreuse sparkle tail. The other is a bright purple glitter with a chartreuse sparkle tail. They work year round, for just about everything in the lake...including white bass, channel cats, bullheads, crappies and even carp. All species have eaten those crazy creations and sometimes I catch several species on the same day on the same lures.



This healthy wallie was taken near the mouth of the Spanish Fork River in late August, right at daybreak, with a red and chartreuse 3" plastic shad grub on a 1/16 oz. head, fished slowly in only about 4 feet of water.



One of my favorite walleye lures for Utah Lake. It is a 3" chartreuse "Shad Grub" with the front part dyed red. The hook is a 2/0 red Matzuo sickle hook with a 1/16 oz. head...red glitter with a chartreuse eye.

I make all of my custom colored creations because I have never found the exact colors I prefer from any other source. I buy solid color plastics, in 2", 3", 4" and 5" sizes and then color them the way I want them, using plastic dyes or special plastic paints. For the red sparkle and chartreuse sparkle combo I start with a solid chartreuse sparkle grub or shad body. Then I use plastic dye to color the front half red. For the purple and chartreuse I get a better end result by starting with a 3X clear sparkle body and then coloring the front purple and the back chartreuse. The solid colors I prefer to start with are clear sparkle, smoke sparkle, chartreuse sparkle, white, pearl and pearl chartreuse.



I use special plastic lure dyes to create a wide variety of color combos...or to brighten factory colors.

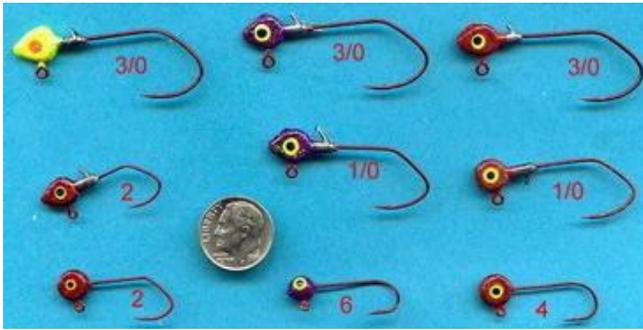
You have to practice using these dyes and learn the characteristics. Some will result in different colors when applied over plastics of different basic colors.

I also pour and paint all of my own jig heads. I discovered a long time ago that I could not find the exact combination of colors, hook sizes and weighted heads that I preferred...so I have made my own for many years. When fishing in water shallower than six feet deep it is better to fish a light head to avoid having heavier jigs dive into the rocks. I use 1/16 oz. jigs for fishing around the rocky areas and off the dikes of Utah Lake. The lighter weight allows me to reel my plastic slowly, just above the bottom, without having to reel too fast and without losing many jigs to the rock gods.

You can buy lots of jigs with 1/16 oz. heads. The big problem is that the hooks are usually far too small to fish them with the larger size plastics you need for walleyes. Most commercially made 1/16 oz. jigs have hook sizes no larger than size 6 or 4. They are made for fishing small plastics for crappie and perch.

I pour my 1/16 oz. jig heads on larger hooks...from size 1 to 4/0. For the 3" and 4" plastics I use the most, I typically fish them on 1/0 to 3/0 hooks. These balance just about right with the size of the plastics, and provide much better hooking ability.

As mentioned, I also custom paint my jig heads. Some are plain white, black or dark red. Some have single spot eyes, of white, black, red or chartreuse. The heads I use for fishing bright contrasting combo colors, in cold murky water, are usually a bit gaudier. Some are two-tone black and white, black and chartreuse, hot red and white, hot red and chartreuse or chartreuse with a hot red eye.



Examples of jig heads I like to use with plastics on Utah Lake. Some have eyes of either white or chartreuse with a black pupil. Others have single color eye spots. The two jig heads in the lower right corner of the bottom picture are “dip heads”...with two tone heads created by dipping the top part in another color after the base coat of lighter colors. These all make good contrasting colors for fishing with various color plastics. But, if it is any consolation, there are plenty of walleyes taken on plain lead heads.

Some of my most effective heads...the ones I fish with my favorite red or purple and chartreuse plastics...are either purple or red glitter with a bright chartreuse eye with black pupil. I probably catch more fish, of all species, from Utah Lake, on my custom colored plastics...by using a red glitter head (chartreuse eye) than with all other lures and baits combined. And, that same combo is effective in many other waters too.

In the spring months, a “lime sherbet” plastic can be very effective. This combo has a lime green top and a white curly tail bottom (or vice versa). Fish it on any contrasting head. Hot pink works well, but so do chartreuse with a red eye or hot orange glitter.

Many hardcore walleye chasers on Utah Lake swear by the black and chartreuse combos...of jig heads and plastics. They do seem to work especially well during low light or murky water conditions. But they also work even during the post spawn period...when water clarity is good and water temps are up. The black and chartreuse may be a good imitation of a tasty young bullhead...a favorite food item of big walleyes.

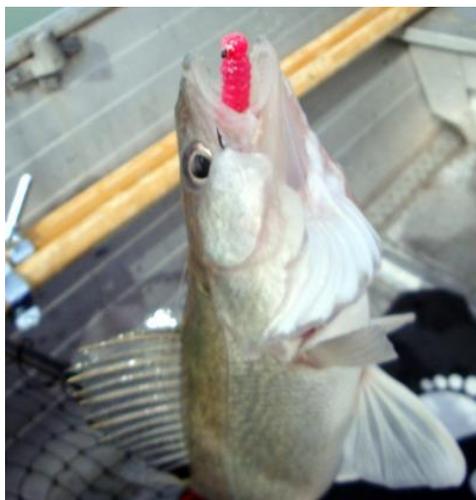
Several plastics manufacturers sell tubes, grubs and swim baits in “fire tiger” colors...green, yellow and orange...sometimes with black stripes. For some reason this color combo is appealing to walleyes...and other species...almost year round. I fish it mostly with orange or fire tiger colored jig heads...often rigged in tandem with one of my other favorite colors.



**Fire tiger is a color combo that works for walleyes almost everywhere. It is especially effective in cold or murky water when the better visibility of bright contrasting colors helps to get more bites.**

**This walleye was taken on a 3" fire tiger plastic being fished on an 1/8 oz. pony jig head...also painted fire tiger...with a chartreuse sparkle blade.**

**One of the best late fall colors, which also can be deadly in prespawn weeks, is hot pink plastic with either a pink or a hot red head. If you can find a good bright hot pink, with silver sparkle, it is well received by almost all the fish in Utah Lake during the cooler months. It seems to work better on smaller walleyes than the bigger ones, but I have taken some bigguns on it too.**



**A prespawn male that slurped up a hot pink 3" grub with a hot pink 1/8 oz. head. It was taken off Lincoln Beach in mid-March of 2010.**

**This color is also very effective on late fall fish when the water temps are dropping and the fish are slowing down.**



**Another nice little male wallie taken on the same day as the picture above. This fish took a silver flecked chartreuse plastic on a hot orange head. This can be a deadly combo almost year round, especially in cold or murky water.**

In the early months of the year, and through the spawn, a chartreuse plastic with silver sparkles and a hot red, pink or orange head can be very productive. It is a good combo for smaller males through the spawn and for the bigger females after the spawn. Strangely enough, the big post spawn females will often hit smaller plastics (in chartreuse and hot red) than at any other time of year. I guess it is because they are easing their way back into the feeding mode and like to start with smaller meals. Within a short time, however, you will be catching them on your largest plastics, marabou jigs and hard baits. Once they put on the feedbag in earnest, you almost can't use lures too large for them.

One of the last three points on fishing plastics is that you should carry an assortment of different sizes, colors and actions. Sizes and colors are easy. Finding plastics with just the right "wiggle" can make a difference and is not always easy. I have tried twisters and swim baits from just about every manufacturer. I test them very carefully in the water, observing how "busy" the vibrating tails are at different retrieve or trolling speeds. Some barely wiggle while others almost whip the water to froth. There will be days when the fish want very little movement. Other days you will knock them dead with a heavy fluttering action tail. On still other days, they respond better to the "no nothing" action of a slowly retrieved tube jig.

The next to last topic on fishing plastics is that you should learn how to rig, cast and retrieve tandem rigs...two jigs at a time. This not only allows you to fish different colors, but sometimes aids in triggering strikes from fish that need a "wake up call". A single jig cruising by might not create much interest. But, run a double rig through the water and it sometimes creates enough extra commotion to trigger a "reaction bite". On the other hand, if the fish are spooky and finicky, you may have to scale back to fishing only a single well-presented plastic to avoid an unnatural appearance.

The last point on plastics is that fishing for walleye is not a purist thing. You are not restricted to using unadulterated jigs. If you want to add a strip of crawler go head on. If you want to add some strips of fish meat, or a piece of minnow (or a whole one), then just do it. Sometimes a little bit of "sweetener" on a jig hook is all it takes to "seal the deal". Also, adding a few drops of your favorite attractant can sometimes make a difference. I favor either shad or anchovy scent, but night crawler and crawdad can work well too.

Many wallie tangles have discovered the Gulp products. Walleyes love that stuff. Put a small Gulp minnow on your jig...or a piece of Gulp worm. And keep a bottle of the liquid scent to refresh them once in a while. Walleyes are a lot more scent conscious than some might realize.