



# Winter months = trophy time for trout anglers

**D**on't be so quick to put your tackle or boat away. Just because air and water temperatures have dropped, fishing season has not ended. Hardy anglers will continue to ply ice-cold western waters for trophy trout, and proper winter techniques and presentations can spell the difference between the trip of a lifetime and just another fishing trip.

**METABOLIC:** During winter's harsh conditions, trout instinctively begin to feed heavily to build up their reserves of fat and subsequent life-sustaining energy. Trout forage at a variety of depths - including sun-warmed shallows and shorelines - looking for minnows, baitfish and other aquatic life. Big fish get big by being smart, but during this time of year, large, wary trout often drop their guard and hit properly presented offerings that normally wouldn't get so much as a second glance.

Consequently, some of the largest trout each season are caught in the winter.

As water temperatures drop well below the ideal range, trout become increasingly lethargic. They eat less frequently and won't spend the energy to chase down their prey. They're less likely to move great distances to feed, preferring to wait in ambush for "easy pickings" that drift, swim or float within their attack range. Even their metabolism, digestion and feeding patterns slow.

The impact of this cooling should not be taken lightly.

**TROLLING TIPS:** By far the most effective technique for catching trout is trolling. This allows anglers to cover more water to locate active, feeding fish, and present baits or lures right in the trout's face.

Slow trolling with lures or baits at speeds from ½ to 1 mph

**"During this time of year, large, wary trout often drop their guard. Some of the largest trout each season are caught in the winter."**

is most effective during the cold-water months. Lightweight flutter-type lures offer maximum lure action and subsequent fish-attracting vibrations at slow speeds, and it's the vibrations that attract fish as their lateral line sensor is their sense of touch in the water. Trout can detect vibrations from 50 to 75 feet away or more depending on wind and surface action.

Nightcrawlers are also very effective as they imitate natural food sources, the freshwater leeches, found in many of our lakes in California. Properly threaded onto hook and line, this "live" natural presentation can be deadly effective. When slow trolling, the intent is to pull offerings right in front of and slightly above the quarry. Attractor blades or flashers create additional fish-attracting vibrations and flash, and are very effective. A small 4/0 trolling dodger, when used in conjunction with a short leader, can be deadly as its side-to-side action creates an enticing swimming, surging action to a lure or bait.

**COVERING WATER IS CRUCIAL:** It's still possible to trigger an instinctive reaction, known as the "impulse strike," when waters dip toward the freezing range. As offerings swim quickly by, a trout will often lash out and attack strictly out of instinct.

Consequently, it's important to cover as much water as possible, thereby increasing the odds of intercepting fish. An exaggerated "S"-turn trolling pattern places terminal tackle in front of more fish than a straight-line route. It also changes the depth and speed of offerings.

In cold weather, fish will move into the shallows in search of sun-warmed water and an easy meal, so trolling close to shore and near points is most effective. As boats approach or pass above them, fish holding in the shallows will likely spook and dart to the side toward deeper, safer water. Longlining, 100 to 150 feet back, can bring lures along as the fish returns. By disassociating boat and engine noise from the baits or lures, anglers are bound to catch more fish.

Sideplaners have revolutionized ultralight trolling and are used when trout hold near the surface or in shallow water as they do in winter and spring. From large "boards" to the small, in-line planers, the use of sideplaner allows anglers to easily get way out to the sides of the boat where fish have moved or may be holding as the boat passed over or by them. Sideplaners provide the means to intercept spooked fish and disassociate terminal offerings from boat, engine and prop noise.

So don't be so quick to put it all away: There are still plenty of opportunities all winter long to catch that fish of a lifetime.

You can thank me later...