

Cool, crisp mornings. Sunny, comfortable afternoons with lower humidity. This is September and October at Smith Mountain Lake. The water temperature can remain warm enough to enjoy an afternoon swim or wake board run well into mid-October. Afternoon and evening boat rides may seem like you have the entire lake to yourself. If fishing is your passion, the transition from summer to fall is a great time to be on the water.

September begins the gradual cool down of the lake's surface temperature. The spring warm-up influences the upper river arms and creeks faster than the main body of water. The same is true for the fall cool-down, just in reverse. Rivers and feeder creeks change temperature more quickly than large lakes simply because less water must be heated or cooled. This is an important fact to remember when planning your September and October Striped Bass fishing outings.

The summer fishing patterns can remain in place well into early October in the lower lake area. Those patterns include fishing live bait down at deeper depths, vertical jigging over schools of striped bass or trolling artificial lures. These tactics have proven to be effective when striped bass are schooled together. After fishing this way for several months in the summer, many anglers are looking for a change of pace, September and October offer just that.

As the water temps cool, the Striped Bass will be able to use more areas of the lake. Anglers can begin thinking about more shallow presentations. Live bait fished with less weight is a great place to start. Many live bait anglers begin using big gizzard shad again as the water cools. The gizzard shad are usually fished on planer boards with light weight or no weight. The purpose of the planer board is to move the bait away from the boat allowing the angler to cover more water. The blueback herring and alewives can be used in a variety of ways that include planer boards, weighted down lines and light lines from the back of the boat. Every live bait tactic is in play in September and October depending on where you fish and the conditions you encounter.

Another popular tactic is casting for Striped Bass. Using top-water baits that mimic injured shad is an exciting way to catch these aggressive fish. Identifying areas where bait fish are active on the surface can lead to some heart-pounding action. Swim jigs with Zoom flukes are an extremely versatile option. My personal favorite is a product made locally called the Swamp Monkey. The skirted round jig head with a shad color fluke is effective when cast toward the shoreline and letting it fall naturally. The retrieve is the most important part of this bait. Once the bait falls to the desired depth, pop the rod tip and that raises the bait in the water column. Let the bait fall again while you slowly reel in the slack caused by the rod tip pop. Continue that pattern back to the boat. The fish might want a faster retrieve one day and a slower retrieve the next day. Experiment until you find the right combination.

Swim baits are another effective bait that require very little expertise. Simply cast the swim bait out, let it sink to the desired depth and begin the retrieve. This is a great way to introduce children to Striped Bass fishing. They are actively engaged in casting their own lure, retrieving their own lure and fighting the fish after the fish hits. Kids will not forget the first big fish they caught "all by themselves".

Pay attention to weather and precipitation patterns. A stretch of cool nights or a few days of rain can lower water temps enough that Striped Bass will show up in more shallow water areas. Also, warmer and drier periods will push the Striped Bass out into deeper water. The water temperature is an important factor for early fall fishing and can help determine the tactic that is best for having a successful trip.