



“Modify Your Popper”

By ED HARP

Fall brings clear water, shallow fish and great topwater bassin'. In some parts of the country, this bite will last well past Thanksgiving. Taking advantage of the opportunity often requires creativity, however.

"I like to fish with topwater baits in the fall. Many times a long cast, with the right topwater lure and retrieve, will provoke explosive, almost frightening strikes," says Women's Bassmaster Tour angler Debra Hengst. "I especially like to fish them over grass flats on clear, sunny days with a light wind after a cold night.

"My favorite topwater lure at this time of year is a Strike King Pro-Model Spit-N-King. They come equipped with Daiichi Bleeding Bait hooks and are good right out of the package. But sometimes a quick hook change will make them even better."

The quick hook change to which she refers involves swapping the front No. 4 treble hook with a bigger, heavier size. The idea is to add a slight amount of weight to the front of the lure — just enough to pull the nose down a fraction of an inch.

There's no standard for hook size or weight, so it's best to experiment. Hengst likes a No. 2 Daiichi Bleeding Bait for her replacements but other anglers might disagree. Find the make, model and size that best suits your fishing conditions and style.

"That little bit of weight may not seem like much, but it really changes the action of the lure," says Hengst. "Lowering the front and cup on the Spit-N-King creates a louder, deeper bloop on the retrieve. And, with a little practice, you can even walk the dog while causing a ruckus on top. That's especially effective in clear water with the rear, feathered hook swishing along behind."

Walking the dog with this lure isn't difficult if you point the rod down in the traditional manner but pull it with shorter, softer strokes. A long rod with a fast tip makes this easier. Some anglers put a little fly line float dressing on their monofilament to keep it up, on top of the water.

Hengst doesn't always do things differently, however. When it comes to color selection she's a purist — light colors for clear water and sunny days, darker hues when it's overcast or early in the morning or late in the evening.

"I don't change things that don't need to be changed. The hook change works. Traditional colors work. It's that simple."



Women's Bassmaster Tour pro Debra Hengst goes after the topwater bite in fall.



Hengst modifies her Strike King Pro-Model Spit-N-King by replacing the front treble with a No. 2 Daiichi Bleeding Bait hook.