

*Follow these tips to  
catch your monster  
musky this fall*

Author Spencer Berman  
releases a 54-inch back  
into Lake St. Clair.

# 3 Keys To

By Spencer Berman, Field Editor

At 8 a.m. on December 1 of last year, I pulled up to the ramp on Lake St. Clair to meet my clients. The temperature was 28 degrees and the ramp was covered by four inches of ice. Luckily for us, some diehard duck hunters had already used chain saws to cut a channel to the last bit of open water left on the lake.

My clients and I had no idea what would happen. The bite started out well with six muskies up to 47 inches in the boat by 4 p.m., and right as the sun began to set my client set into The One. After a long fight during which it seemed no one breathed, I slipped the net under a massive 45-pound fish, easily one of the biggest ever in the 60-year record books of this storied musky fishery.

This catch was one of those for which all diehard musky anglers live. It's in this late fall period surrounded by snow and ice that lake records, state records, and even world records get caught. It isn't luck — all monster catches are set in motion by a series of elements. In this article we are going to look into three main factors that will help you determine when is the best time to target late season giants and how to do it most effectively.

### 1. Conditions

There is no doubt that the best time to go after a late season musky is whenever you can, but if you are able to pick your times there are two key factors to consider — weather and the moon phase. In the fall the weather is extremely variable, often with hard north winds and large cold snaps. Having said this, the best time to go after a fall monster is when stable weather precedes a cold snap.

This consistent weather will have the fish feeding in an effort to put on much needed weight before winter.

If there is a cold snap approaching and the barometric pressure is spiking, you will typically see an even bigger increase in musky activity with intense feeding before the weather moves through and they hunker down for a few days.

The other major factor in the fall is moon phase, because it is incredible just how many big fish are caught during the days around either the full or new moon in October and November. During this time you will often see a spike in baitfish activity, which always serves to get the biggest fish in the lake active. In inland waters this phenomenon is so powerful that guide Josh Borovsky of Pro Musky Guide Service on Minnesota's Lake Vermilion says he can look at the lunar tables for the fall and pick out the highest percentage days when the monster fish will most likely be moving. Since the lunar table is something you can plan for months in advance, it should always be considered when planning fall trips.

This concept holds true on almost all inland waters where water clarity is not a factor. On the other hand, when you look at larger fisheries such as St. Clair and the Great Lakes, wind and water clarity trumps the moon nearly every year. On such waters there are times when you can't even get to where you want to fish due to strong winds creating huge waves. Obviously when this happens it does not really matter how good the bite is since you are sitting at the dock.

Additionally on these systems, water clarity plays a huge role in fish movement. When the water turns to "chocolate milk" and you can't see an orange lure two inches down,

# o Fall Giants

### 3 Tips For Fall Giants

the bite is going to be extremely tough no matter what moon phase you have. On the flip side, when the water color clears up and the muskies can hunt with both vision and lateral line sense, they tend to feed. The biggest fish almost always seem to be caught during clean water periods on Great Lakes waters. For that reason when you are looking to target fish on the Great Lakes, always defer to the wind forecast over moon phase.

### 2. Location

When targeting trophy muskies in the fall, the name of the game is food. The biggest muskies will be in areas that are loaded with forage fish. In the Midwest there are two major forage fish that inhabit lakes that grow giant muskies — shad and ciscoes. Both species are extremely high populating and high in fat, thus being keys to growing giant muskies.

These baitfish act differently in fall. Shad are cold-sensitive and will look for warmer water, so in most cases they will either move into deeper water basin areas or migrate to large inflowing rivers that tend to have warmer and deeper water. On the other hand, ciscoes are thinking about reproduction in the fall and tend to spawn right before ice-up. Thus they will be moving out of deep water and up on rock reefs or shallow hard bottom areas to spawn.

In either case you will see a huge amount of shad or ciscoes massing into relatively small areas. When this happens you will also find plenty of muskies ready to eat. However, due to the extremely high concentrations of baitfish,



The author's client, Ryan Fields, caught this massive 45-pounder on a Pounder.



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the muskies are not always the easiest to catch. Think about it, when you have 100 muskies relating to a rock bar that is covered with 20,000 ciscoes, your lures end up being nothing more than one more baitfish among 20,000. The result is short feeding windows.

This concept of a few short feeding windows throughout a day, or even a week, is why most top musky guides in the country choose to hunker down on key locations and wait for the fish to bite. Top Green Bay guide Bret Alexan-



der says that in late fall he will pick the best-looking rock reefs that are loaded with ciscoes and whitefish and troll over them all day long just waiting for the muskies to turn on.

"The late fall is no time to run and gun," Alexander said. "The big muskies will be on the best spots with the most food and that's where you have to put in your time in order to catch a big one."

On inland trophy lakes such as Vermilion, Borovsky says the late fall is the time to shorten your list of spots. In his opinion the fall is a time for patience, and there is no such thing as a magic spot. "You simply need to wait fish out on high percentage areas and that's how the monsters get caught! Bottom line is that in the fall on trophy musky waters you are going to be looking for areas that have a ton of baitfish," Borovsky said. "Due to the amount of baitfish the muskies are going to have short feeding windows with long stretches in between. For this reason you should always look at this period as a time to shorten your

list of spots and pick only the premier areas, and then fish that spot until you stick your giant!"

### 3. Lures

Although most musky fishermen have hundreds if not thousands of lures, the fall period is not the time to search through your tackle box for a "magic" lure. Lure selection is very similar to spot selection — pick the highest percentage and let them fish! On Lake St. Clair I pretty much know that my biggest and heaviest fish of the season are going to be caught on a Pounder BullDawg.

Too many anglers change lures way too often. In the shortened and limited feeding windows of fall, it is imperative that you stick to high percentage lures so you can capitalize when they open. People who are more impatient tend to go through their tackle boxes and within a few hours they have used a pile of lures. By doing this you run the risk that when the feeding window opens up you will be throwing something off the wall and

won't get a strike from the late season giant you are after. Borovsky, Alexander and I agree that is not uncommon for us to fish the same lure for days if not weeks at a time, only changing colors to match different lighting conditions. By doing this you will have high percentage baits in the water and take advantage of the feeding period.

Once you start to see the leaves change color you should start to think about giant muskies. The late fall period is a chance for you to land your personal best musky, if not some kind of record. By being conscious of the conditions you are dealing with and limiting your movements and lure selection, you can keep the odds of catching a giant in your favor.

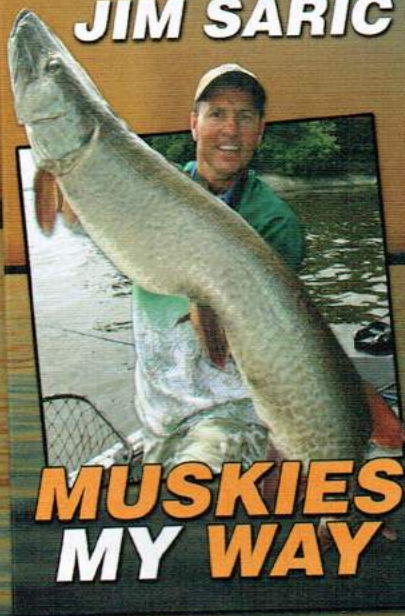
*For more about Field Editor Spencer Berman, visit [www.spencersanglingadv.com](http://www.spencersanglingadv.com)*



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