

Finesse fishing in shallow water

by Skeet Reese

One of the many great things about fishing is that presents endless possibilities. Pretty much everyone takes to the water with a single goal in mind: to catch fish. Some people use artificial lures, other use bait; but within these two types of fishing lie a multitude of options for getting more fish in the boat. Skeet Reese is the 2007 BASS Elite Series Angler of the Year and an 8-time Bassmaster Classic qualifier. Reese lives in Auburn, Calif. This time of year, a lot of the bass are in shallow water for a couple of different reasons. First, they are chasing shad, which are spawning in the backs of coves. Second, as the nights get cooler, the surface temperature of the water is also cooling down. So, when the sun does rise, the first water to be warmed the most is the shallow water. There's a lot of ways to fish these shallow bass this time of year, but one that is sometimes overlooked is a finesse approach. When most bass anglers think of shallow-water bass fishing, most of them think of shallow-running crankbaits, big Texas-rigged plastic worms or flipping a jig. All are very effective, but these techniques have been used for so long, why not switch it up? Two of my favorite finesse techniques for catching shallow fish are the drop shot and the wacky rigged soft bait. Most people think of the drop shot as a deep-water technique, but by adjusting the distance in between your hook and your weight you can fish this bait extremely shallow. For drop shot, I use a 7-foot medium-action spinning rod and an Abu Garcia spinning reel spooled with 8-pound Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon line. Fluorocarbon line is important in this technique because it is less visible underwater. I like a small octopus hook or wide-gap hook tied to the line with a Palomar knot. Leave about 8-10 inches of line below your hook and attach a 1/4-ounce drop shot weight. A Green Pumpkin Berkley Gulp! Sinking Minnow and a Berkley PowerBait Hand Pour Finesse Worm are two great drop shot baits. Cast the baits near areas likely to hold bass in ambush (around structure, primary depth changes) and shake the rod tip. By shaking the rod tip, you keep the bait in the strike zone but are moving it just enough to make it look alive. If you don't get bit, drag the weight a few feet and start over. Another effective method for shallow bass in clear water is a wacky rigged soft bait like a Berkley PowerBait Fat Dover Crawler. The wacky system allows you to keep the bait in the strike zone longer and it creates a lot more action with the bait. If you rig a bait straight and you twitch it once, it is going to easily move 2-3 feet away from any fish within the strike zone. With the wacky system, it creates a lot more resistance in the water. It pushes the water more and makes the worm kick, giving you a lot more movement out of it. That extra movement out of a little worm creates a lot of strikes. For me, my wacky rigging equipment consists of a 7-foot spinning rod with 8- or 10-pound Trilene 100% Fluorocarbon line. As far as hooks go, I use a wacky rig hook: a short-shank, wide-gap hook with round bends. Just stick the hook point through the eggs sack (or thickest portion) of the bait and weight the bait with tungsten nail weights, but you could even use an actual finish nail if you have trouble finding nail weights. This time of year is a great time to go after bass. There is a lot less boat traffic and the bass are largely congregating wherever there is an easy meal. Try a little finesse the next time you go chasing fish into the backs of coves and see how slowing down and downsizing your tackle can result in more strikes and bigger fish. Skeet Reese is the 2007 BASS Elite Series Angler of the Year and an 8-time Bassmaster Classic qualifier. Reese lives in Auburn, Calif.

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