

25 Ways To Work A Jig

Story and Photos By Keith Sutton

Two panfish anglers are fishing from the same boat using the same type of jig. One is hooking fish after fish. The other can't buy a bite.

Sound familiar? I know it's happened to me more than once, and usually I was the angler who wasn't catching fish.

There was a time when I believed that my fishing companion — the guy catching fish — was just luckier than me. But after finding myself in this situation once too often, I started studying what my buddy was doing. In nearly every situation, he was working his jig differently than me. The differences often were subtle, but they were enough to account for the variations in our catch rates.

No matter what type of panfish you are after — crappie, bluegills or other species — the way you work your jigs plays a big part in your success or lack of it. You must present the lure in a particular fashion — fast, slow, twitching, jerking, creeping, racing, jumping or sitting — that gets a fish's attention.

Fish are fickle. Some days they prefer one pattern, and some days another. So it's good to know a variety of ways to work a jig. The savvy panfish angler switches from one variation to another until the best method becomes evident.

Following are 25 ways to get you started. The first 12 are tactics to use when fishing with a jiggling pole or canepole. The last 13 are rod-and-reel tactics.

The Jig

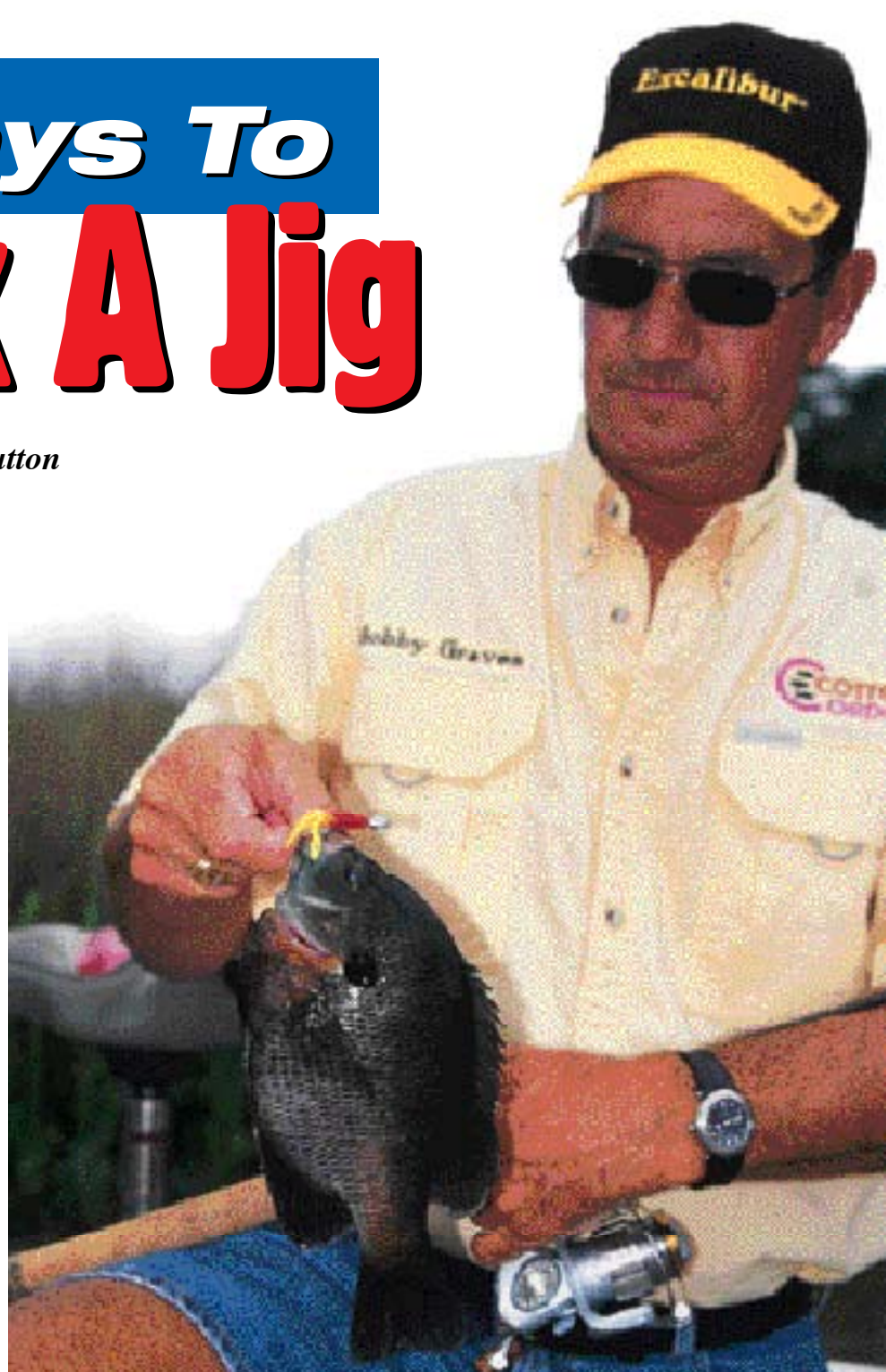
Not surprisingly, jiggging a jig is the most used method of working one. The lure is held stationary for a moment. Then, with a quick, upward snap of the wrist, the angler lifts the lure a short dis-

tance and lets it fall again to its previous depth. The timing of this jiggging action may vary considerably, from a quickly repeated motion to a slow, well-spaced jiggging of the lure. Try several variations to see what works best.

The Do Nothing

Often as not, the best way to work a jig is doing nothing at all. Start by tying the jig properly. The knot should be pulled to the top of the hook-eye so

the jig hangs perpendicular to the line. Then lower the jig to the fish's level and do your best to hold it there without moving it at all. You may think the jig is perfectly still, but it will shimmy ever so slightly, like a minnow finning in the water, with just enough action to draw the attention of a nearby bream or crappie. Marabou jigs and skirted tube jigs are especially effective because they ripple seductively even when stationary.



The Shake

The shake is similar to doing nothing, but every few seconds the angler gives his pole a snappy side-to-side shake that vibrates the tip of the pole, which in turn shakes the jig. This tactic works best if you use a fast-action jiggling pole that bends very little except at the tip.

The Wiggle

The wiggle works on a long or short line. The angler simply wiggles the pole up and down very slightly while moving the lure along the edge of a brushpile, log or other cover. The lure swims from place to place with a slight up-and-down motion, like that of an erratically swimming baitfish.

The Tap

The tap is part of a tactic once called jigger-bobbing or shake-poling. This is an effective method of catching panfish scattered in the shallows. The angler holds his pole in one hand and balances it across the opposite knee. Then by very lightly tapping the pole with his free hand, he causes the jig to shake and the tip of



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the pole to flip water, like little baitfish flipping at the surface. Strikes usually come swift and hard.

The Trigger

Try this when using a jiggling pole with a reel. Drop the lure to the depth where fish are holding, then use the index finger of the hand holding the pole to reach up and pull the line, then release it. This is similar to the way you might pull and release the trigger on a gun. The action gives the jig a quick, upward hop. Pause, then repeat.

The Figure 8

In muddy water, panfish hold tighter to cover in shallower water. Most anglers move from one spot to another very quickly, but in muddy water it's best to work slowly. The figure 8 allows just that. Place the jig close to a stump, log or other cover, then work it around slowly in a figure-8 pattern. Continue working the lure in this manner around the feature you're fishing.

The Clean-And-Jerk

This method often gets the attention of inactive panfish. Use your pole to flip a jig out on a slack line that's at least as long as your pole, then allow it to sink until the line begins to tighten. Now give the jig a hard, upward pull and allow it to sink again on slack line. Enticing a fish to strike may require changing the distance you pull the jig upward each time, from short hops to long leaps.

The Lift-Drop

A guide taught me this method for catching jumbo catfish, but it works equally well when fishing for panfish around stumps and logs on the bottom in a few feet of water. A 1-ounce bell sinker tied at line's end allows the angler to feel the bottom and find the stumps. Tied above the sinker are two 6-inch drop loops 18 inches apart. A weedless jig, such as the Charlie Brewer Crappie Slider, is tied to each loop. While wind-drifting or slow-trolling with an electric motor, work the rig using a constant lift-drop, lift-drop motion. When you feel the rig bump a stump, lift it up and over. Strikes often come just as the rig is lowered behind woody cover.

The Elevator

Tournament angler Kevin Rogers didn't name this tactic, but "The Elevator" seemed an appropriate moniker for the method he often uses to catch crappie when vertically jiggling around standing timber.

"After your lure reaches the bottom, grab the line with your free hand and gently raise the lure up the tree," Rogers says. "Crappie will not go down to hit your jig, so raising the lure puts it in their face. They can't stand it."

The Swim

A curly-tailed jig that's allowed to swim a foot or two beneath the surface alongside a moving boat is great for

catching panfish in the shallows. Rest the pole across one knee while you move your boat very slowly along the banks. No action of the lure is needed except the forward motion imparted by the moving boat.

The Dart

If swimming a jig doesn't produce, grab your pole occasionally and pull it sharply forward to make the jig dart through the water like a baitfish that's been spooked. This often draws strikes from less active fish.

The Knock-And-Roll

Panfish frequently seek shelter around the buttresses and knees of cypress trees. You can use a jigging pole around these trees, but if the fish are skittish, it's difficult to approach close enough to use a pole without spooking them. Instead, remain at a distance and use an ultralight combo to cast a jig against the side of the tree. Cast right at the tree and let the jig knock the trunk and roll into the water below. Fish holding right beside a tree and waiting for insects to tumble off will quickly grab the falling lure.

The Crawl

At times, big bluegills and other panfish hold right on the bottom. When this is the case, cast a jig as far as possible, then crawl the lure back to the boat right across the bottom.

The Leapfrog

When panfish are in shoreline shallows, you often can elicit smashing strikes by casting a weedless jig up on the bank and jumping the lure back into the water. Panfish get crazy when a tiny morsel leaps from the shore and starts swimming away.

The Bobber Jerk

To catch panfish around weedbeds, use a jig placed 1 to 4 feet below a small bobber. Cast the lure into open pockets or work it along one edge. Retrieve in a jerk-stop fashion, pulling with a hard tug so the jig rises toward the surface, then stopping long enough to allow the jig to sink perpendicular to the surface again.

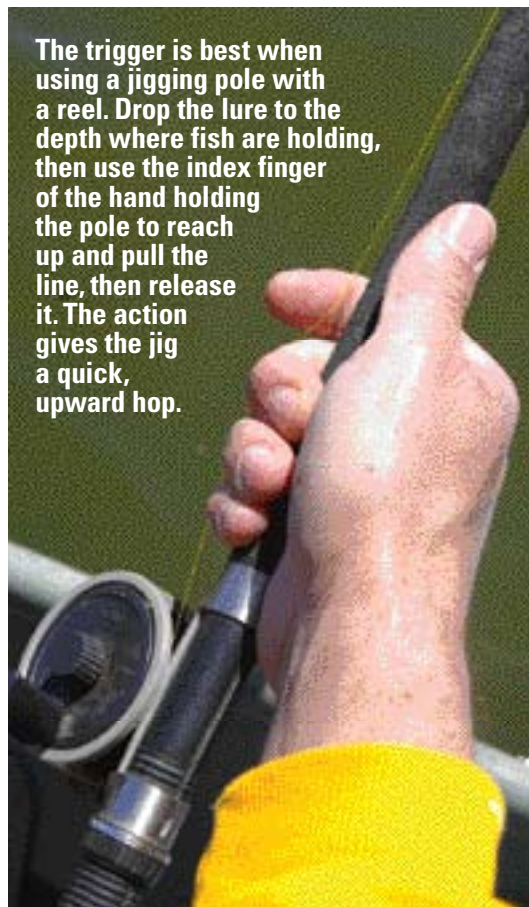
The Free-Fall

Bridge pilings in deep channels usu-

ally attract summer and winter panfish. Using your sonar, you can ease along the pilings and spot fish concentrations. Note the depth of the fish, then back your boat away from the bridge and cast a jig beyond the pilings. Allow the lure to free-fall to the correct depth before beginning a slow retrieve. Keep the lure very close to the pilings and work the area thoroughly.

The Sweep

When panfish are suspended around deep ledges, sunken islands, isolated brush-piles and other such cover, position your boat directly over the target structure, then lower a curly-tailed jig to the bottom. Engage your reel and take up slack. Then begin a delicate upward sweep of the rod tip to activate the lure. Move the rod tip as little as 12 inches or as much as 36 inches, experimenting to determine if the fish have a preference.



The trigger is best when using a jigging pole with a reel. Drop the lure to the depth where fish are holding, then use the index finger of the hand holding the pole to reach up and pull the line, then release it. The action gives the jig a quick, upward hop.



“The Elevator” is good when vertically jigging around standing timber. After your lure reaches the bottom, grab the line with your free hand and gently raise the lure up the tree.

Next, slowly drop the rod tip, letting the lure drift back down. Maneuver your boat around the structure, working the jig this way.

The Step Down

Hopping a jig down the steep face of a rock bluff, hump or long-sloping point works great at times. Cast the jig to the shallowest part of the structure, allow it to sink to the bottom, then give the lure a quick jerk and allow it to settle once again. Jerk it again, let it settle to the bottom and so forth. In effect, this is like bringing the lure down a set of steps, from shallow to deep water.

The Yo-Yo

If the lake level starts falling fast due to power generation or other factors, try fishing points using a jig to which you’ve added a small safety-pin spinner. Retrieve the lure with a steady yo-yo motion — up, down, up, down — created by raising and lowering the rod tip as you turn the reel handle. Position your boat in deep water and cast toward the shallow part of the point, or vice versa.

The Stump Bump

Stump fields in mid-depths are prime holding areas for spring and fall panfish.

However, stumps often snag tube jigs so that you’re doing more tying than fishing. In this situation, try a weedless jig such as Blakemore’s Road Runner Jaker Jig or Charlie Brewer’s Crappie Slider. Cast past the stumps, let the lure settle, then retrieve the lure slow and steady. Ideally, you want the lure to bump every stump you can find. This is a tactic that for some reason incites fast strikes from nearby crappie and bream.

The Slingshot

This technique uses a short fishing rod like a slingshot to catapult a jig beneath a dock or boathouse where shade-loving panfish often lurk. Use a 4½- to 5½-foot medium-action rod with a spin-cast reel or an autocast spinning reel that allows you to pick up the line and flip the bail at the same time. Pinch the jig carefully between your thumb and index finger of your free hand, pull the rod back like a bow, then aim and release the lure, letting it fly beneath the structure. With practice, you can slingshot a small jig 15 to 20 feet under a dock where big panfish are hiding.

The Float

This method of working a jig beneath a bobber often entices inactive suspended panfish. Determine the depth of

the fish on your sonar, then rig your jig beneath a bobber at the same depth. Use a sliding bobber if necessary to allow for easy casting and be sure your jig is tied securely so it sits perpendicular to the line. Cast to the fish you’ve pinpointed, then allow the jig to settle beneath the bobber. Do not move the jig at all. Let it drift with the breeze if one is present, but don’t let it drift off the fish. Watch the bobber closely. When a fish inhales the jig, the disappearing float lets you know.

The Flip

Flipping a jig enables an angler to efficiently work shallow cover from short distances. To do this, you need a long pole/reel combination. We’ll suppose you’re using your right hand to hold the pole. Place your boat the distance you’ll be fishing from the cover you’ve selected, position the pole tip over your target, drop the jig to the bottom in the cover and engage the reel.

The pole should be parallel to the water and at a comfortable height with the lure resting on the bottom and just a little slack in the line.

Now, grab the line loosely with your left hand between the reel and the first guide, and pull the line to your left while lifting the tip of the pole. The jig should come clear of the water and most of the brush. Gently set the lure back in the water, release the line and let the jig fall to the bottom again in another spot. Shake or hop the lure for a second or two and repeat. Watch your line closely. Sometimes the only indication of a bite is the line twitching or moving.

The Cast And Reel

At times the best method is also the easiest. Just cast a jig and reel it in. Don’t worry about how fast, how slow, how deep or how shallow. Just cast and reel. It’ll work more often than you think. 🎣

Manufacturers Mentioned

Charlie Brewer’s Slider Co.
1-800-762-4701
www.sliderfishing.com

TTI-Blakemore
(334) 567-2011
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