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# Here's what you need to know to land that northern

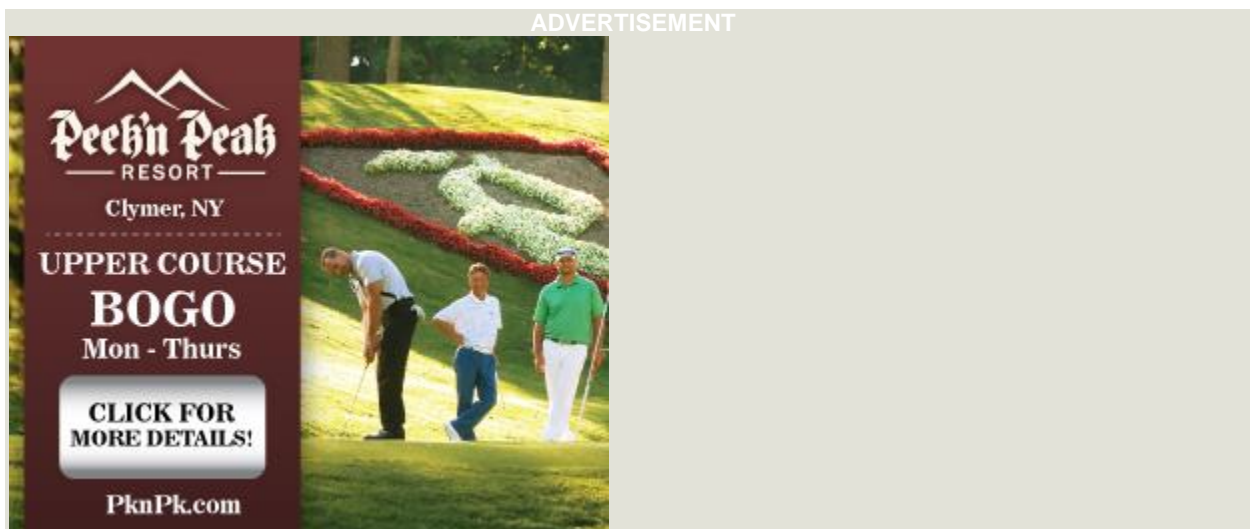
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An advertisement for Peehn Peak Resort. On the left, a dark red vertical banner contains the resort's logo (a mountain peak), the name "Peehn Peak RESORT", the location "Clymer, NY", and the offer "UPPER COURSE BOGO Mon - Thurs". Below this is a button that says "CLICK FOR MORE DETAILS!" and the website "PknPk.com". To the right of the banner is a photograph of three men on a golf course; one is in the middle of a golf swing while two others watch. The background of the ad is a light grey gradient.

It's fall, and Presque Isle pike are back from vacation.

Large pike pass the summer months in cool, deep water, returning to their shallow hunting grounds in autumn when the temperature drops. This is bad news for baitfish, but good news for northern pike anglers, who can once again target their favorite toothy maulers.

You can find pike in many of the same places they frequent during spring, but catching them requires different techniques.

Remember back in May, when you were bagging pike more than 30 inches long on thumb-sized spoons? Good times, right?

Well, forget about it.

The same pike in October won't give that minuscule offering a second glance. Fall pike are on the prowl for big meals and anglers need to beef up their arsenals (and casting arms) accordingly.

You know that saltwater plug your brother got you as a gag gift last Christmas? The one that's bigger than your forearm? Get it out and tie it on. Even small pike will hammer huge lures in the fall.

As the water gets colder, progressively larger pike appear in the shallows. In Presque Isle Bay, I typically start to see pike more than 30 inches long in late September. By October, the elusive 40-inchers have arrived. In November, anything goes. Last year a friend hooked and lost a 50-inch Pikezilla at the side of the boat.

Though pike can be found throughout the bay, specific seasonal cover attracts them. I look for aquatic vegetation that's still green. Brown, decaying weeds don't produce oxygen -- in fact, they absorb it -- and seldom draw fish.

Locate living, breathing cabbage on prime structure like points, inside turns and drop-offs, and you've found a likely pike lair.

Larger pike (and occasional muskies) tend to lurk on the outer edge of thick weed beds, over lower-lying intermediate weeds, and close to deep-water access points. I work these areas with plugs, swimbaits, bucktails (don't be afraid to burn them) and spoons -- all in mondo sizes. The Dardevles I throw in fall are at least 5 inches long, more than an ounce (depending on the depth I'm fishing) and primarily designed for musky trolling.

Anglers who shelve their surface lures when water temperatures drop miss out on a lot of explosive action. An aggressive pike in depths under 10 feet will blow up on a buzzbait or creeper even in relatively chilly water -- upper 50s is ideal -- and so will a surprising number of largemouth bass.

After a fall cold front, pike usually bury themselves in weeds. A hard-pumped 7-inch chatterstick can draw these sulky fish out. Grinding spinnerbaits and silver minnows through the slop will get them, too.

When waters reach late fall/early winter temperatures it's best to slow things down. Try jigs or suspending jerkbaits with long pauses on the retrieve.

Live bait is a good fall option, and, like lures, should be supersized. Bait shops sometimes carry suckers, but don't count on it. I trap fat creek chubs or catch panfish for bait. Run them under a bobber with a two-hook quick-strike rig. To avoid gut hooking and potentially killing a pike, set the hook immediately after your bobber goes down. If you miss the fish, don't worry -- he wasn't the size you wanted anyway. Large pike have no trouble taking a bluegill or crappie in a single gulp.

The summer slump is over. Get out there and give 'em the big stuff.