

Top Tinkering Tips for Bass

by In-Fisherman



Peek into the rod lockers of top anglers and you'll spot some unusual baits, cinched up and ready to throw. Many pros rarely use a bait they haven't tuned. Tinkering ranges from minor alterations like changing skirts on spinnerbaits, bending out treble hooks on crankbaits, coloring soft plastics, and trimming jig skirts, to novel looks lure manufacturers might hardly recognize.

In 25 years of tournament bass fishing, I've seen some of the oddest alterations. But every time I think I've seen it all, I see a new one.

TRICKS WITH TUBES

Of all baits on the market, none has caught the interest of tinkerers like the soft plastic tube bait. Perhaps it's because tubes look too simple to catch fish, like they need a little jazzing up.

Rattle Tubes — Tube meister Shaw Grigsby favors finesse for clear-water bass, but he's found that bedding bass in darker water bite rattling tubes better. He may insert a brass rattle chamber in the end of a 1/2-inch section of surgical tubing. He impales the other end of the tube onto the hook so the rattle is secured within the body of the tube. Alternately, he slides the surgical tubing onto the hook once it has pierced the nose of the tube and before it enters the body, then inserts a rattler in the tubing.

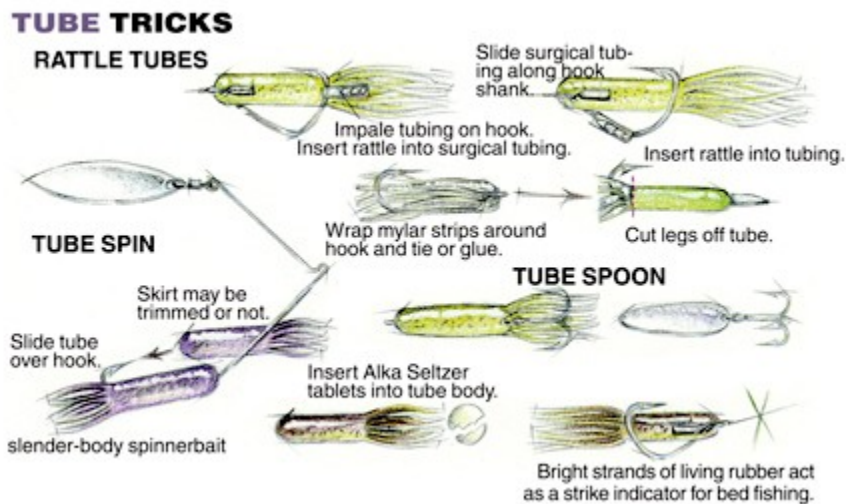
A couple new rigs also aid sound production. Lindy-Little Joe offers the E-Z Tube Weight, a cylindrical lead weight with a rattle chamber, with a hole for hook insertion.

Check out Prowler's new vacuum sealed Glass Tube Rattle and Mizmo's Rook's Thunder Rattle for easy application and great sound.

Bobby Garland, designer of the original tube bait, the Gitzit, prefers to add rattles internally, placing one in the nose section, then inserting a section of plastic worm to hold it in place. For fishing open areas, jigheads inserted into the tube work best. K & E Tackle offers a Rattlin' Tube Jig with a rattle chamber in the head.

Double Tube — Smallmouths are notorious for chasing hooked buddies trying to steal the lure. Double the action by trailing two tubes behind a Mojo or Carolina rig (check fishing regulations).

Floating Tubes – Nearly all soft plastics sink when a hook is placed in them, so Bobby Garland uses foam inserts to float a tube behind the sinker on a Carolina rig, a concept that Mann's Bait Company uses with its Floating Jelly Tube. I've created floating Slug-Gos for some deadly lily pad action. Soak the insert with a scent product for a long-lasting effect.



Flashy Tube – Sometimes flash is a better trigger than sound. To make a flashy tube for clear, shallow water, or anywhere small shad are flitting, wrap mylar strands around a straight-shank worm hook, sized for a tube, and secure them behind the eye with thread, wire, or glue. Thread the flashy hook into a tube with the skirt cut off, and peg a 1/16-ounce slipsinker to secure the rig.

Tube-Spoon — While flash can be a killer, muting it can also mean extra bass, as fish become conditioned to the flash of jigging spoons in popular deep-water spots. Slide a Hopkins, Cordell CC Spoon, or other slim model into the body of a tube. Translucent tubes allow some chrome to show through for a natural look as well as a soft feel. The tube also holds flavor attractants well.

Dyed Tubes — Bass pro Guido Hibdon's favorite tube trick is coloring the tail of a tube with dyes or adding mottled hues to tempt finicky bass. He favors blue and brown dyes when imitating crawfish, chartreuse tails when targeting smallmouths.

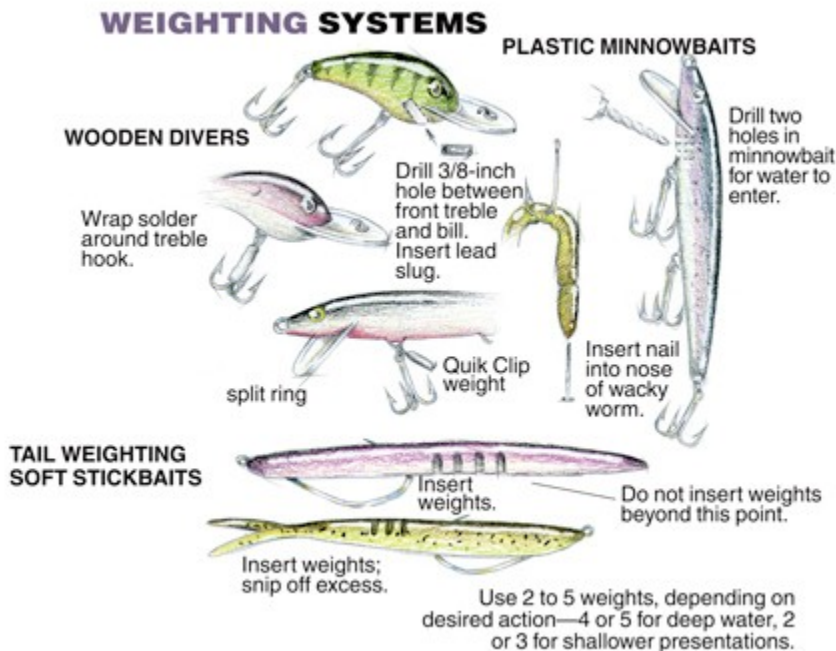
Tube Spin — One of Guido's more unusual tube tricks is the Tube Spin, which he says combines flash and finesse. He molds the spinnerbait body with an elongated head, though any narrow-head design works. His favorite spinners for this technique have a single #3 or #4 willowleaf blade matched to a 1/4- or 3/8-ounce head. Hibdon threads the tube onto the hook and up over the head, securing it with super glue. He sometimes shortens the skirt. It's great for schooling bass in offshore areas and when bass have cornered shad along a bank.

Strike Indicator — While bed fishing with neutral-color tubes, it's hard to see when a bass mouths the bait. Tie a strand or two of chartreuse living rubber in front of the bait to indicate bites.

Fizzy Tube — Inserting a Crackle capsule or an Alka-Seltzer tablet tempts inactive or spawning bass. Worm Fizzion offers a gel formula that also creates a popping sound when submerged.

WEIGHTY MATTERS

Depth control often is critical, so experts increase the weight of standard baits to keep them in the fish zone.



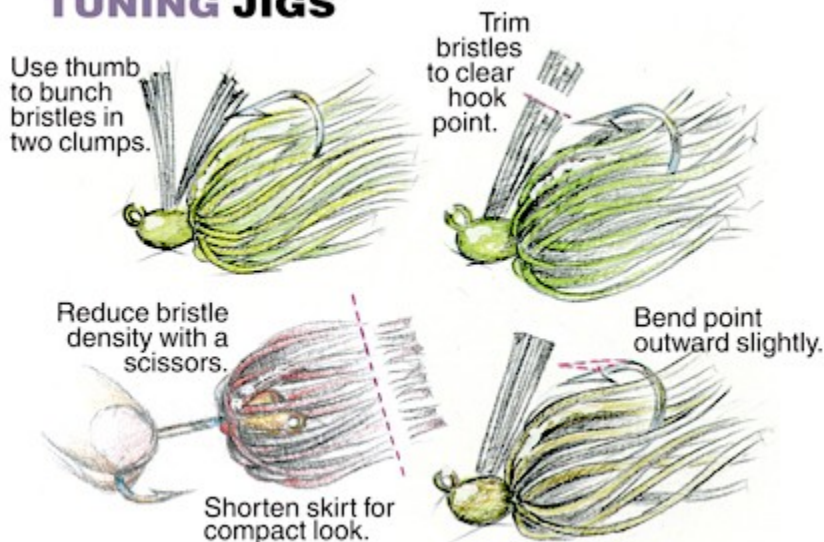
Weighting Crankbaits — For years, David Fritts and other crankbait experts have added lead slugs set in small holes drilled between the front treble hook and the diving bill of wooden baits. Epoxy the work and paint.

Clamping lead solder around the shank of the front treble hook or adding a Luck “E” Strike Quik Clip weight to the split ring holding the front treble are old tricks. Lead wire used in fly-tying works, too. Storm’s SuspenDots and SuspenStrips, adhesive lead strips that can be added and removed, make the task easy. The latest innovation is Sticky Weight, a tacky tungsten mixture that’s 30 percent heavier than lead. It adheres to the belly of hardbaits, or even your line and can be shaped like clay, peeled off, and reused.

The Holey Rogue — In the Ozark reservoirs of Missouri and Arkansas, weighting baits, particularly minnowbaits, is a way of life for bass anglers in early spring. Jeff Fletcher, a bass pro and guide in this region, uses weighted jerkbaits to catch suspended largemouths and spots along steep bluff banks. Fletcher uses a “Holey Rogue,” a bait with two holes drilled in front of the forward treble hook. Water enters the bait and causes it to sink at a rate Fletcher estimates at half a foot per second. It stays deep, but can be twitched slowly to tempt stubborn bass.

Fine-Tuning — To fine-tune a weighting system, substitute heavier or lighter treble hooks. Use a gram scale since larger hooks sometimes weigh less than smaller hooks, due to differences in metal, wire gauge, and shank length.

TUNING JIGS



Nailing a Wacky Worm — The wacky worm (a straight-tail worm hooked through the middle) acquires a special action when a nail is inserted straight into its nose, causing it to stand straight up with its tail wavering — a great early-season trick.

Tail-Weighting Slug-Gos — From the start, Slug-Go inventor Herb Reed recommended inserting slender weights into the lure body for fishing deeper or during windy conditions. *In-Fisherman* magazine contributor Brett Richardson inserts one or more Lunker City nail weights from the belly side behind the last belly slit and clips them off at the lure’s skin. With a Fluke or Fin-S-Fish, insert three short sections of nail weights from the back, behind the hook, and then clip.