Choosing the Right Crankbait for Bass

Crankbaits are a staple in many anglers' tackle boxes, and for good reason. They cover water efficiently, trigger reaction strikes, and imitate a range of forage. But with so many shapes, sizes, and materials on the market, picking the right one for the day can feel overwhelming. This article breaks down the key factors that determine how a crankbait behaves and when to use it, helping you make a more informed choice next time you're on the water.

Understanding Diving Depth

The first thing most anglers look at is how deep a crankbait runs. This is largely determined by the size and angle of the lip. A long, wide bill that sits at a sharp angle will push the lure deeper than a short, stubby one. Shallow runners typically dive to around 2 to 4 feet and are ideal for working bank lines, flats, and grass edges. Medium divers reach 6 to 10 feet, covering most common structure like points and drop-offs. Deep divers can go 15 feet or more, letting you probe main lake ledges and deep creek channels.



Matching the bait's running depth to the depth of the fish is critical. If your lure runs too shallow, it stays above the strike zone. Too deep, and it constantly fouls on bottom or snags. Many modern crankbaits have a "deflection" advantage: they bounce off rocks or stumps and trigger bites from fish that are holding tight to cover. Knowing the approximate depth of your target zone helps you choose a lure that will tick that cover without hanging up constantly.

The Role of Lip Shape and Material

The lip is the main control surface. A round, wide lip tends to give a tighter wobble and more stability at speed. A pointed or narrower lip can produce a wider, more erratic action that appeals to active fish. The lip material matters too. Plastic lips are common on budget and mid-range lures; they're durable and produce a consistent action. Metal lips, often seen on older or premium designs, can create a sharper vibration and sometimes a louder rattle.

Some anglers prefer a bait with a lip that is molded as part of the lure body, while others like a separate lip insert. There's no universal right answer, but the lip shape directly affects how the bait deflects off cover and how tight its wobble is. A bait with a wider lip may bounce more cleanly off a stump, while a narrower lip might dig in and get stuck. It's worth experimenting with a few different lip profiles to see which one you trust in your local water.



Body Material: Balsa, Plastic, and Others

The body material affects weight, buoyancy, and action. Crankbait body material choices fall into three main categories: balsa wood, plastic (usually ABS or polycarbonate), and composites. Balsa wood lures are light for their size, float high, and have a wide, slow wobble at low speeds. They are excellent for fishing shallow, clear water where a subtle presentation matters. The downside is durability; balsa can crack or get waterlogged if a toothy fish bites through the clear coat.

Plastic crankbaits are heavier, denser, and more durable. They cast farther and sink faster, which changes how they run. A plastic bait often has a tighter, faster wobble and can be fished

faster without losing its action. Many plastic baits are also louder, carrying more internal rattles. For covering water quickly or fishing around heavy cover, plastic is tough to beat.

Composite bodies, often a blend of wood and resin, try to combine the best of both. They offer good durability with a lively action. When considering bass crankbaits, the body material directly influences how the bait feels on the retrieve and how it behaves at different speeds. A balsa bait may feel "live" and responsive, while a plastic bait feels solid and predictable. There's room for both in a tackle box.

Action, Weight, and Hook Choices

Crankbait action describes how the lure moves through the water. Tight wobble, wide wobble, roll, and vibration frequency all matter. Some baits are designed to imitate a fleeing baitfish with a fast, tight wiggle. Others are built to wobble slowly and heavily, imitating a wounded or disoriented prey. The action is set by the lip shape, body shape, and the weight distribution inside the lure.

Weight also affects casting distance and sink rate. Heavier baits cast farther, which is a big advantage when you need to cover a long bank or reach a distant point. But a heavier bait may sink too fast for a shallow, weedy area. Some crankbaits have internal weight transfer systems that shift the weight to the tail during the cast, then back forward on the retrieve. These cast like a heavier bait but run like a lighter one.



Treble hooks are the standard on most crankbaits. The hook size and gauge matter. Thicker wire hooks are stronger but heavier, which can kill the action of a small or light bait. Many anglers replace stock trebles with sharper, lighter options to improve hookup ratios without ruining the lure's balance. It's also common to upgrade the rear hook to a slightly larger size to catch short strikers. Keep in mind that changing hooks changes the bait's action and diving depth slightly.

Putting It All Together

A well-rounded crankbait selection includes a few shallow divers for the banks, a couple of medium runners for main lake points, and at least one deep diver for ledges and humps. Within each depth category, try a tight-wobble bait and a wide-wobble bait. That covers most scenarios. When you're on the water, pay attention to how the bait feels. A good crankbait will "talk" to you through the rod; you'll feel the vibration and know when it ticks bottom or bumps a branch.

If you're new to fishing crankbaits, start with a floating model in the 6 to 10 foot range. Cast it to a bank or point, count it down a few seconds, and retrieve it at a steady pace that makes the bait wobble. Vary your retrieve speed until you feel the bait working. That feel is the key to confidence. Once you trust the bait, you'll fish it more effectively, and that's when the bites come.

Choosing the right lure is about matching the conditions: water clarity, depth, cover type, and the fish's mood. A shad-colored bait in stained water might be perfect, while a natural craw pattern works better in clear water. The same goes for size: sometimes a smaller profile gets more bites, other times a big, loud bait triggers a reaction. There is no single perfect crankbait, but understanding how each variable affects performance lets you adapt quickly.



Bass crankbaits have earned their place in fishing history because they are effective across many seasons and water types. By focusing on diving depth, lip shape, body material, and action, you can narrow down the choices and find what works on your local waters. The more you experiment, the better you'll understand the subtle differences between a tight-wobble plastic bait and a wide-wobble balsa bait. That knowledge makes you a more versatile angler.

Take the time to study your lure collection. Look at the lip angle, the body shape, and the hook size. Think about where you plan to fish and what depth you expect. Then pick a bait that fits that plan. If it doesn't produce, switch to something with a different action or depth range. Over time, you'll build a mental library of which bait to reach for in each situation. That instinct is

what separates an occasional crankbait user from someone who fishes them with real confidence.