Fligs on Ice

By TubeDude

Fligs (floating jigs) were originally designed for presenting baits and plastics to walleyes and other species that hang out and/or feed near the bottom. Their success was due to a combination of presenting the offerings up a bit off the bottom and adding "bling"…in the form of colors and flash…for visual appeal.

Since then, fligs have produced a lot of fish of a lot of species for a lot of anglers. However, most of the time they are still fished along the bottom…either by drifting, slow trolling or cast and retrieve. There are several options on how to rig the necessary sinker on a bottom bouncing flig rig. Most will work…most of the time.

During the early years of my fligging experience, one of the ways I used fligs was to probe deeper waters with a "dropshot" rig. This involved having a suitable weight of sinker on the bottom and one or two fligs rigged on droppers above the sinker. Fished with small tubes, twisters or natural bait the fligs often got more attention than plain jigs or spoons fished in the same areas.

Dropshotting was developed by bassers…for vertical presentations of plastics to bass hanging near the bottom in deeper waters. Having the direct connection to a lure suspended above bottom allowed them to wiggle and jiggle their sexy lures and drive the fish crazy. A lot of bass tournaments have been won by skilled dropshotters.

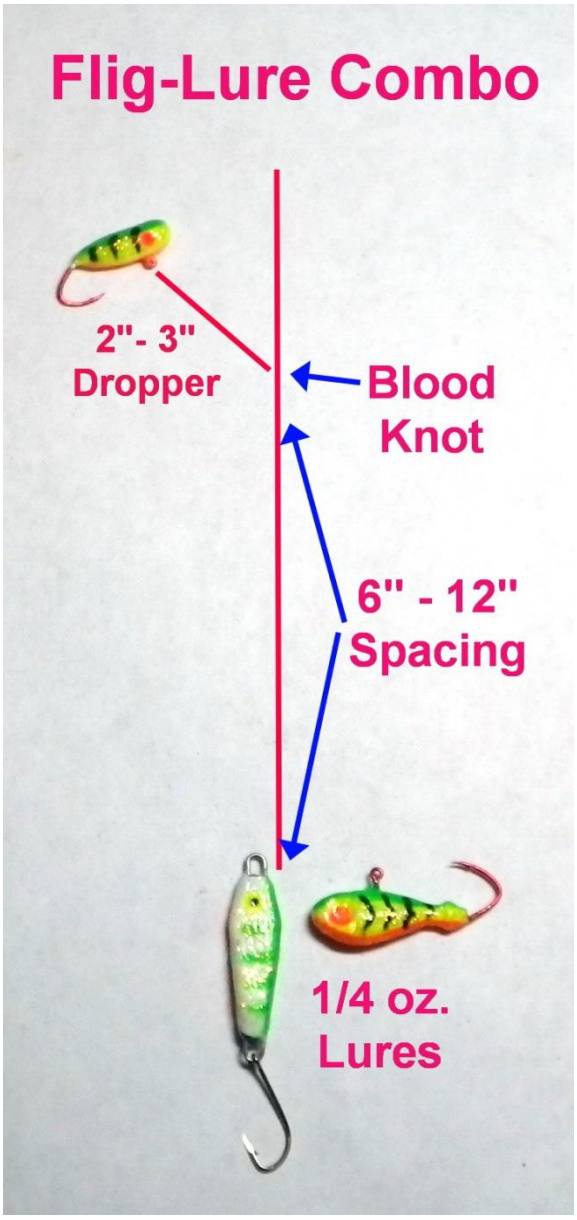
Ice fishing and dropshotting are natural go-togethers. When you drop your offerings into an ice hole you are making a vertical presentation. No fancy cast and retrieve techniques with ice fishing. But by properly rigging and fishing something dropshot style you can do very well at times.

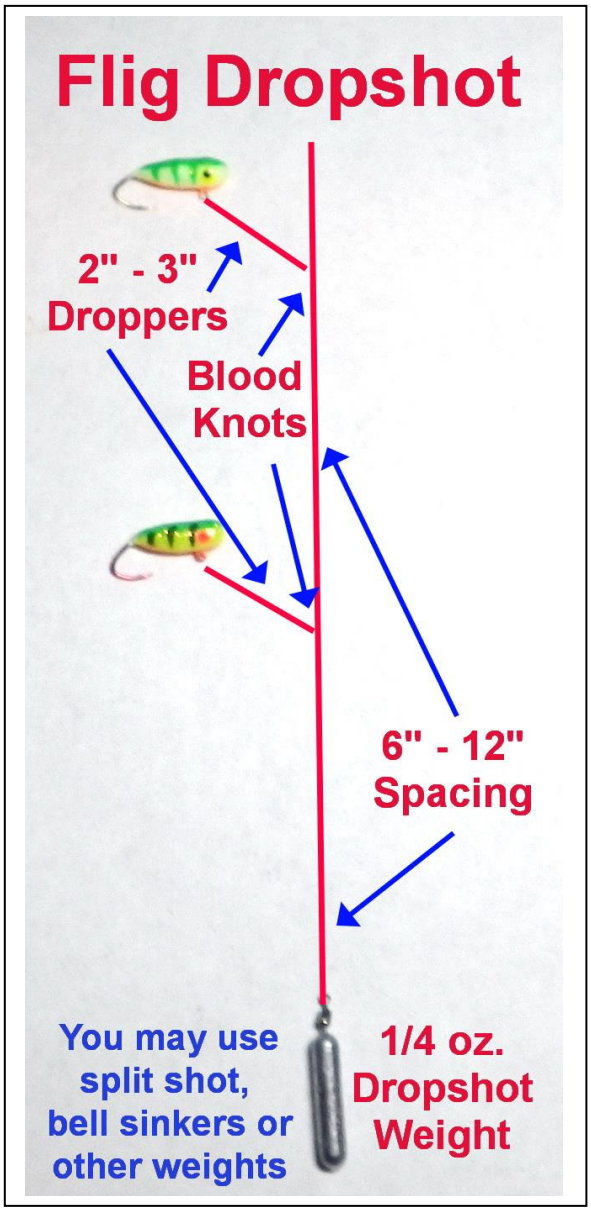
Much of my ice dropshotting has been simply by using either a tandem jig rig or rigging a small jig above either a larger jig or a jigging spoon. These setups allow you to send down two different bait/lure combinations and fish them at slightly different depths. Fish that are bigger and/or more active will generally hit the larger jig or spoon. Smaller or less active fish are more likely to take the smaller offering. But not always. I have caught some hefty fish through the ice on small jigs…fished above something bigger.

Another type of under-ice dropshotting is favored by quite a few ice fishing fans. That is to attach a suitably heavy weight on the end of their line and then to tie in one or two small jigs above the weight. The weight pulls the small jigs down to the bottom in deeper water much faster than they would get there with a natural sink. And once the weight is resting on the bottom, the angler has better feel for what is going on at the other end of his line. The weight pulls all of the memory coils out of the line and keeps a more direct contact between angler and lures.

Fligs are a natural for dropshotting through the ice. And they can be used for either of the previously described rigs…in combination with heavier jigs or spoons…or with a suitably sized weight on the bottom. Here in Utah we are allowed to use up to three baited jigs per line. So you can even use one heavy jig on the bottom and two little floating fligs rigged at the desired distances above the weighted jig.

I make and use fligs of all sizes…up to and including some on big 8/0 hooks for sturgeon and magnum sized catfish. Many sizes and styles of fligs will work for ice fishing but you will usually do better with smaller sizes for most species…on most waters…most of the year. Size 6 hook fligs are a good choice for most ice fligging. The hooks are small enough for most ice baits but big enough to hook and handle large fish too. But there will be times and places where using the larger models will work too.





The two diagrams above show the two basic ways to rig a flig dropshot setup…with either weighted lures on the bottom or else any kind of sinker. Of course you can use your own personal preferences and best judgment on the right way to rig for any given water/species/bait situation.

Blood knots are generally the best knots to tie for short droppers off the main line. This is not a true "dropshot" rig…in which the hooks are tied directly to the line. You want the flig to be able to take advantage of its buoyancy and to wiggle and jiggle with every little movement of the rod tip.

While it is legal to use up to three baited hooks on one line, for ice fishing it is not a good idea to have too many potential ice-catchers on your rig. Otherwise, one of the extra jigs or fligs might catch on the rim of the ice while you are trying to get a big fish up through the hole. Disaster.

As previously mentioned, you can fish any size flig you wish…depending on the time of year, the species you are pursuing…and size…and the type and size of bait you are using. In the two pics below, there are both glow and non-glow ice fligs.





CONSIDERATIONS:

COLOR: There are times and conditions when the fish will show a definite preference for one color over all others. However, using the right bait at the right depth…where there ARE fish…is generally more important than color. Many times it is not so much a specific hue that attracts the fish. It is more likely to be a color that is most visible under the prevailing conditions of temperature, light and clarity. Sight-feeding fish often have sensitive lateral lines and even good night vision…but being able to see your offering adds a lot to the chances of getting a bite.

GLOW VS NON-GLOW: As with choice of colors, using a glow jig may help…but not always. Fish seem to survive pretty well by eating natural foods without glow. And there are a lot of ice fishing situations when plenty of light is available at the depths you are fishing so there is little need for adding glow. This is especially so on shallower lakes, early in the season…when there is thinner ice and less snow…and when oxygen levels are still high enough to keep fish active. In deeper water, under thick ice and heavy snow layers, a bit of glow can help fish spot your offerings from greater distances and bring more in to check out your goodies.

BAIT: Fligs…like most ice fishing lures…are simply a part of the BDS…bait delivery system. Fish will hit a lot of lures that are not "sweetened" with a bit of bait, but you will almost always catch far more if you tip your jigs and fligs with some real food.

Almost all fish rely on their senses of smell and taste to help determine whether or not a potential edible is munch-worthy. Bright colors and/or glow help attract the fish visually. The right jigging action creates vibration and movement for additional attraction. But your offerings also have to pass the scent screen before fish slurp your goodies.

There are innumerable choices in baits to use on ice jigs. These include a variety of worms and larvae. Then there are minnows and pieces of fish flesh. Some ice tanglers like to stick with plain old garden worms, salmon eggs, cheese or "bottle baits"…like PowerBait. And in the past few years there have been more and more artificially scented plastic goodies like the Gulp stuff…maggots, worms, minnows, etc. These things all work.

In addition to the actual baits, it is not a bad idea to carry and use liquid or gel fish attractants. Apply a drop or two periodically to refresh unmunched baits. And simply using them to help mask human odors…or to cover up the smell of gasoline from a balky auger…can make a difference in whether fish open their mouths or turn up their noses.

DEPTH: On every trip you have to first find the fish. Good sonar helps. But during the day the productive depth may change. Depending upon the waters you are fishing and the species available your targets may be anywhere from on the bottom in deep water, suspended mid-depth…or cruising through not far below the ice.

Fishing fligs on the bottom…with either of the two rigging options previously pictured…is the simplest way to present them. Drop the rig to the bottom, bounce the weights on bottom a few times to create commotion and raise some silt. Then raise the rig slightly off the bottom and wiggle and jiggle it to make the fligs dance. Stop periodically and watch the rod tip. If it nods upward, a fish has taken your floating flig while moving up. If the tip bobs down, the fish has come up off the bottom to take it and is trying to get back down. If your sonar shows fish coming through above your rig, reel up to that depth, wiggle it and hang on. It might take some practice but once you get it…you've got it.