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FRANKLIN NC --For about 20 miles from where it exits Lake Emory until it begins to form the headwaters for Fontana Lake, the Little Tennessee River regains the characteristics of a broad-shouldered, free-flowing mountain stream. It's a clear-running, relatively big river studded with boulders and split by long riffles and tailout pools.

The occasional run of fast water is frisky without being dangerous. The Little T, as it's locally known, is classic smallmouth bass water that's stacked with 1 and 2 pound bronze backs and surrenders enough 4-pounders' to make catching a big fish not a rarity. And although you need a canoe to fish it adequately, the Little Tennessee is an operator of the Great Smokey Mountain Fish Camp and Safaris. Small mouth action on the Little T generally begins to fire up in April and continues through late fall. That's when both the water level and temperature are most conducive to floating and fishing. "In early April you'll often get your bigger fish but usually not big numbers offish," Anselmo said. "But the (small-mouth) fishing really kicks in around mid- to late April."

Anselmo says the secret to hooking into a Little Tennessee smallmouth is a simple one. Take an ultralight spinning rig and spool it with 4- or 6-pound line. Stuff a handful of crawfish imitators into your vest, crawl into a canoe, and head downstream.

Hit the pocket water that swirls around the river's many boulders. Then beach the boat wherever a riffle pools out. Cast slightly upstream and work the lure down and through the slack water. Use a fairly slow retrieve but don't hesitate to try different speeds. "I love to fish right behind a shoal," said Anselmo. "And I like to hit those swirls behind the rocks. The smallmouths lie in there and wait for food to wash by. Wherever you have a little swirl, try to make a cast there."

Lure selection is simple. Anselmo rarely strays from the Rebel Wee-Crawfish with a green back and orange belly. "I probably fish with that 90 percent of the time," he said. "But if they're chasing shad, I might go with a green-and-chartreuse grub."

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--Gary Garth

IN NORTH CAROLINA:

A SMALLMOUTH SPREE ON THE LITTLE T