

## **Beautiful Fall Colors, Great Fishing**

By Steve Welch

I am blessed to guide on a lake bountiful in fish and miles of trees showing off their fall colors. No homes clutter the scenery, nature at its best. Geese flying over head, migrating pelicans gliding over head. Eagle sightings and tons of deer.

This is Lake Shelbyville in the fall. Ski boats long gone and at times you think this large reservoir is yours. Weekdays on Shelbyville in the fall are what I live for. Why I love my job and get to be outside each and every day. Meet all sorts of interesting people and share a common bond, we all love to fish.

Once we start to get the cool evenings and the water temps fall back into the low sixties and even lower the crappie come alive. I have been guiding every day for white bass and yes they are biting as well but it is crappie fishing that got me into this business and my passion.

Big crappie tends to roam out in the deep basins of Shelbyville during the summer and this makes them rather elusive. You can catch nice sized crappie on deep down trees and in the front of the bigger coves during the summer but for me if I can't get a triple limit or very close then I will stick with the white bass. We catch thousands of white bass every summer and clients want action and fish to take home.

October for me is the start of what is always the best crappie fishing of the year and that is fall crappie. Great weather no huge cold fronts and pounding cold rains like we have in March and April. This sets up the crappie on a normal pattern you can repeat day after day. I make a milk run so to speak. I change it day to day so I don't over harvest a certain tree. I play the same wind game I do with the white bass. I know the bait will move with the wind and the crappie will follow. I like a deep bank cluttered with down trees that had wind on it yesterday and the day before. If you get three or four days of a certain wind direction the fish stack up on that bank.

What I really like about October and early November is that any pattern you want to fish is working. You can take a scenic trip up the Kaskaskia or Okaw River and fish very shallow brush with corks and jigs. You can fish sunken brush on the north end of the lake in the mid depths as most do or you can fish the extreme deep down trees on the mid lake to south end. I do all three patterns but love to fish deep and there is less fishing pressure on these fish.

Chances are you see anyone fishing these deep and I mean deep trees on the mid to south end they have been with me and I taught them how. Shelbyville is full of trees standing in forty feet of water with branches lurking just a few feet under the surface. To master this first you have to get over the stigma of fishing a brush pile like you would on the north end of the lake. On these brush piles you most always fish just a few inches off bottom right down in the brush. My pattern starts with trusting what you see on your screen. If you see branches at ten-feet in forty feet of water you fish ten-feet.

My system starts with good electronics dialed in to see all the high branches and more importantly to see your jig on the screen. But before this happens I have three GPS systems and side imaging to find these hidden jewels. I can go by a bank fifty feet away and spot any down tree and count how many branches are on that tree and see fish in those branches.

To do this you need to leave your ten-foot dipping rod at home. I use a spinning rod and place it right in front of my trolling motor, which has my transducer on it. The cone will only pick up a small section of the lake so you have to stay close to see your jig on the screen.

I spool my rod with 8/3 Fireline Crystal so I can get better feel of my jig but more importantly if I am to get hung up I can straighten my hook by just popping the rod tip and freeing the jig. To do this the rod needs to be stiffer than a normal crappie rod or you can break the rod.

Next I use my special Deep Ledge Jigs (available on my website). They are quarter ounce and have a small light wire hook to allow them to bend. The heavier jig allows you to probe the heaviest of structure and purposely run into it. I hit a branch then slightly rise my jig and let it fall off the backside and boom a hungry crappie will nail it.

I know the stigma of fishing the lightest slowest falling jig you can find. I am a little different. Instead of trying to make a crappie bolt out of his hiding place to take your jig as it free falls, why not put it right in front of his nose and force him to take it. I can hold it as still as a church mouse in any wind or I can swim it back and forth in a brush pile or down tree at exactly the same depth as that branch and make them hit it.

With the heavier jig and the stout rod and the no stretch braid you have no problem feeling the bite. They slam it anyway. It is fall not finicky eating summer fish.

Shelbyville is in the best shape of her life. With high water over these past three years the bait has flourished and thus the fish have grown. I caught more crappie pushing two pounds this spring than ever before. I credit that to the high water and my learning a lot more about the south end of the lake. I have been forced from fishing the north end for the most part as most of our brush was in too deep of water.

Like I said the north end gets seventy-five percent of the crappie fishing pressure and if I happen to be fishing on a brush pile off shore on the north end these days with everyone having GPS. I won't be the only one fishing on that spot for long. Too much pressure on a single spot will ruin it. This is why I move so much taking just a few fish from each spot. You never want to fish it out or it will take a week or more for it to refill. I have a thousand waypoints on my Lowrance systems and most are on Lake Shelbyville so I can run and gun all day and never repeat a spot sometimes not repeating that spot for a week or more.

Fall fishing is nothing but tranquil and the scenery is breath taking and with my no how and knowledge of the lake you will go home with an experience you will soon not forget. I will teach you more about deep structure fishing than you can learn in years. I have been guiding now for 16 years and this year full time as I have already done 138 trips this year since mid March so somebody must think I know what I am doing.

Give my website a look over and look at all the happy clients from just this year and then go back and look at last years fall crappie and the year before and year before that. I am telling you it is really good. So give me a buzz and set something up before all the dates are filled.  
[www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com](http://www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com) or 217-762-7257home and 217-840-1221cell.