

Climb Out Of That Deer Stand for a Day

By Steve Welch

All anglers think crappie fishing is a spring sport. I beg to differ, the period from mid October until mid December is far better than the spring. We have stable weather and predictable fish. Spring is full of cold rains and then it warms up then gets cold again. The spawn is unpredictable too. Cold fronts will drop them back and by the time you know the spawn is in full swing. It is over as quick as it started.

The fall bite is limit after limit. We limit out each year for thirty days in a row or more before we slip and just barely miss it then another streak starts again. I have been crappie fishing now since late August following these crappie and just hammering them. We catch thousands each year and there is no better table fare. So I tell all the hunters to switch it up and go crappie fishing with me for a day and fill that freezer with the tastiest fish there is.

Besides the great crappie fishing the trees are as beautiful as you will see anywhere. The ski boats are long gone and most days this huge reservoir is all yours. I rarely see more than handful boats during the week. I routinely see Bald Eagles in the fall and winter. If you have coveralls and warm boots you will be quite comfortable as weather in central Illinois in October and early November might start out in the high forties but quickly warm up to seventy or so. The best time of the year in my book.

The crappie will move back to the shallows once the water turns over at about sixty degrees surface temperature. This happens about late September. I have been catching crappie on a deep summer pattern since August and have been biting the bit waiting on cooler weather so I can start catching the big fish.

The shallow bite in October starts the ball rolling. I get a few crappie every fall pushing the two-pound range but each day we get plenty of fish over a pound or twelve-inch's. We arm ourselves with three different rods. The first is a twelve-foot rod to tight line near stumps or brush. All you need is a couple of feet of line out of the end of the rod. Then I also have a ten-foot rod with a slip cork and jig under it so I can stay back and fish brush and stumps also set at about two-feet or less. The last rod is a spinning rod with twenty-pound braid and a fixed cork. I use this rod if I am fishing extremely shallow and can't get my boat to the fish. We might be fishing only a few inches deep with this rig.

Once we get into November the fish will move back to the brush in ten to fifteen feet of water. This is when all the electronics I have on board come into play. I have twelve hundred waypoints on Shelbyville alone. I have down scan and side imaging on the front and back of my big Ranger bass boat. I can what a brush pile actually looks like. I can see every branch and fish hidden within those branches. If I see a brush pile over a hundred feet out to the side of my boat I can mark it with my GPS and proceed to drive right over to it and start catching fish. I have used this system all summer long to find huge schools of fish and target white bass.

To fish this deep pattern I use a custom made rod that is eight feet long. I like it shorter than the traditional rod so I can see my jig on my big ten-inch Lowrance mounted on the foot of my trolling motor. The jigs I always use are my custom made and balanced Deep Ledge Jigs. They have inset prism eyes and a number four light wire hook so I can probe the thickest of brush piles and feel each branch. My jigs are a quarter-ounce and a lighter jig will not give you the feel needed to get deep into the brush and neither will a rod with a lighter tip. I swear by them and everyone that uses them does as well.

I have a custom made seating system that I put in the boat once the fish move deep. This seat allows three anglers to set right on the nose and fish vertically down in the brush. I can see each jig on the electronics and that way we can get the big fish that tend to suspend right on top of the brush.

I have developed a line of custom crappie jigs that everyone loves them. They are perfectly balanced and have inset prism eyes and range from 3/32oz. on up to 1/4oz. We also have a line of custom hair jigs that are setting the local world on fire. We have also developed a lure to walleye and white bass fish called the Candy striper that we can't make them fast enough. I get positive comments about these lures from somebody every day. They are available on my website at www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com.

While you are there check out the calendar of my available openings and then go to my newest addition the chat room. We are currently getting it off the ground right now and I hope it will be a big success.