

Cold Fronts, Cold Rain That Is March Crappie
by Steve Welch

Hey I am back out on the water again so who cares about a little cold weather it's better than setting home. You can't hone your skills in front of the TV.

Every year I make it a point to be up and running March 1st. My winter seminar trail is winding down and I have clients waiting biting at the bit for early action.

The way I normally book clients this early in the season is we'll go if Mother Nature gives us a warming trend sort of day or preferably two.

This year in January I set there at work and watch some beautiful weekdays go by only to have the weekend be nasty but hey it isn't much different in March only those nice days can really be nice.

The reason I am so excited about seeing that sun in the early season is that is the key or pattern so to speak. The difference between an average day and a spectacular day.

The fish seem to really prefer brush over old wood in the spring up on the north end of Lake Shelbyville and the more you know about the better off you will be. These fish will pull up over the brush and suspend on sunny days. Sure they do the same thing on standing wood but you can get your limit off some brush versus a couple of fish on standing wood.

In recent years there has been a lot of brush showing up on the north end of the lake be it fisherman or Mother Nature putting it in the lake who knows. All I know is that Lake Shelbyville is a flood control lake and for those of you who complain about it's sheer size and don't know where to fish now is the time to get down there.

Any brush that you find in the five to seven foot range right now will have spawning fish on it in May after the water comes up to summer pool. The good thing is you can see it now, so get out that GPS and make you a milk run of waypoints for future reference. Bass fisherman you should be doing the same. Your fish will use these spots after the Crappie leave.

The one thing I do like about March fishing over early April is that we really haven't hit the rainy season yet and we will have good watercolor up on my end of the lake. If we do get muddy though I will just put the boat in down on the south end. It is always gin clear you just have to fish deeper down there. My rule of thumb about the south end is you find fish 6-10 on the north end just add five foot to that. They are always deeper. I don't have near as many brush piles to fish so I am always looking for suspended fish close to bunches of standing trees. Keep an eye on your electronics because any cloud on your screen could be shad but most likely it is Crappie. You have to do more sorting through small fish down there so I prefer the north end.

Like I said Lake Shelbyville is an Army Corp of Engineers Lake so they use it for flood control. This exposes old stumps on main lake flats and sandbars so use extreme caution. Just give all your flat looking banks a lot of space and swing way wide of all the points. The sandbars that you can hit up on the north end are all exposed. There is two by the Railroad Bridge and one over by the Coal Shaft Bridge. Watch out for point five and six and in front of the Findlay marina. All these spots are shallow a long ways from shore. Or you can just hire a guide they know how to navigate and also cut your search time and your learning curve down considerably.

I have been a guide down on this huge reservoir since 1994 and it has thrown me a curve ball or two but you must always learn from that or clients just won't reschedule. Arguably my best asset is my pure knowledge of patterns in the early season and I have more GPS waypoints marking brush than probably anyone does. I even use it in the summer to mark ledges where I know the White Bass hang out. I have just over two hundred to refer back to. I use my system every time I am on the water. It isn't just a navigational tool like some of my other buddies use it for. Bass use brush and stumps, Walleye use brush and stumps, but Crappie are really wood oriented. The accuracy now is close enough to mark just a single stump and I use these stumps on the points to do my Walleye fishing later in the year.

I now have a Lowrance 332c GPS/depth finder on my dash and a Lowrance 102c on my nose. For those of you fighting the urge to go color just try one. The picture is fantastic. With depth contours and hotspots fishing technologies and creek channels clearly marked. I will open up my deep fishing game to a whole new level.

Let us talk about early season tackle and lures. First of all the huge baits I was using just before ice up are gone for a while and I am back to small baits such as a sixteenth ounce hair jig or a Bob Folder tensile jig. Both good early season baits. The tensile gives off a lot of flash and the clear early season water the fish can pick this up a long ways off. The hair jigs I use and the tube baits I use all have to have some

sort of chartreuse on them. Weather it is white and chartreuse or red or black and chartreuse. Those are my three best. The brands that I use are SouthernPro (www.SouthernPro.com) or Midsouth (www.midsouthtackle.com). I have used both of these brands for years and I just put them on a Reeves sixteenth ounce jig. (217-864-3493). Since I am always asked how to get a hold of these brands I thought I would just put them in the article.

The rods that I use vary. I keep three six foot spinning outfits spooled up for throwing the fixed or slip-bobber. I have three twelve foot poles to hover over shallow fish so as not to spook them and I have three nine foot poles to hover over the deep fish. They all have their strengths. It is easier to cast a spinning rod with the fixed cork than it is to cast a long rod and you don't get hung as much with the twelve foot rod in shallow brush but I do like it very wimpy down on the tip section so I don't set the hook so hard it pulls out. My nine to ten foot rod must be stiff so I can horse fish out of thick cover and feel a light bite as well. I don't care if it is a B&M or a Wally Marshall or many other brands that are made just don't give an arm and a leg for them. We are just to hard on them jamming them down into brush to free that sixty-nine cent jig from that branch. You will break a few tips before you get the hang of it. The reels that I now use are made by the Bee Ready Co. they are very small bait casters with a bait clicker alarm on them. Bee Ready (918-724-3920) these are great to go in their spider rig rod holder systems.

You can still see me at a few more fishing shows or out on the water this spring or just book a trip and I will show you a great day on the water. Till then great fishing.