

Crappie Are Not Just A Fish to Chase in Spring

By Steve Welch

Lake Shelbyville reminds me of a small Lake of the Ozarks commented a customer of mine the other day. It really has changed over the years and today it is very clear with very deep banks from mid way down the lake to the south end. The north end is very much a different lake and fishes very differently. It is the deep south end we are talking about today.

We don't have boat docks all over the lake since it is a flood control lake. The shoreline is quite pristine and all you see is down trees one every bank you look at. Some still have all their branches out on the end of them and some are just the main trunks and very little small branches. When they made the lake they left any standing tree that would eventually be under the water and with all the fluctuation we have had trees just slide in standing up.

This provides for very good cover to hold deep summer crappie. The channel banks drop off into very deep water very close to the shore and a down tree on these banks might be in twenty plus feet of water just ten-feet from shore. It is these and the standing trees that they left that we target in the summer.

I use my Lowrance HDS side-imaging unit to travel down these banks and pinpoint the best trees loaded with small branches and then you can see all the crappie hiding within these small branches. We then drop a waypoint on them and switch the unit over to down scan. Once we get back over these trees and watching them on down scan they look like an oil painting of a winter scene and all the little white spots hiding in the branches are crappie. We then freeze the screen and move the curser down to the exact depth the fish are suspending in the branches and then drop a marker buoy right on top of them and get back and set up a slip bobber to hover right over their head. Sounds easy and really it is with today's electronics.

This whole system will work on any lake not just Lake Shelbyville I tell clients. I use a long twelve-foot heavy action Wally Marshall crappie rod. I want a very stiff rod to land any bruiser I tie into. I routinely catch huge channel catfish and bass in these tree branches.

On my spinning reel I have twenty-pound Fireline Crystal. It is very stiff and has a coating on it that seems to hold my slip bobber knot very well. This is important since you can't be off a foot and catch these fish. I then use a quarter-ounce weight to get me down to these deep fish and under that I use a barrel swivel and tie on a one-foot piece of seventeen-pound Stren fluorocarbon. I tried fourteen and it broke too easily so I saw no fish catching difference in the seventeen so I stuck with it. On the end of the fluorocarbon I use a number four aberdeen hook. It has to bend easily to get itself free from snags. Then all you need is a slip bobber big enough to hold everything up.

The last piece of the puzzle is my Keep Alive bait system. I have a sixteen-gallon tank that is insulated and oval so as not to harm the delicate crappie minnows. I go through about twelve dozen minnows a day between my two clients and myself so you need a very good live bait system.

Most would never think to crappie fish during the summer months but these deep shorelines along the river channels is where they live all summer and winter so in a way they are bunched up. Mid day sun has them tight to the trees and this also helps in finding them. Calm early morning summer days the bait is out in the middle of these deep basins and the crappie are roaming around looking for them but once we get high skies and a slight breeze the bait moves over towards the channel banks and finds hiding spots within the tree branches of these standing and down trees. The crappie and other species follow.

The thermo cline also helps us during the summer. We target trees that have branches especially their highest branches right in the thermo cline. These standing trees that they just left out in the

river channels will look like a winter scene of an oil painting and hiding within are white spots that are crappie.

A good map or a Navionics or Lake Master mapping chip is also very helpful. This will give you the banks that have the river channels running close to shore. So technically you are using your side imaging along with your mapping card and lastly your down scan to give you the exact depth to set up your slip bobber. Today's electronics really speed up the search process and with a little practice you can go to any lake and get yourself on crappie in no time by just learning their habits and migration routes and being able to spot them on your down scan versus other species. They all look a little different.

For the first time in 2012 I can get you booked into my guide service without a three-month wait. My fall trips are booking already but I wouldn't wait the summer crappie fishing is red hot. Just go to my website for availability.