

## **Crappie Pre-Spawn Lake Shelbyville**

**By Steve Welch**

Lake Shelbyville crappie spawn is a little different than most lakes since it is so big and a flood control lake to boot.

The crappie spawn starts mid-month in April on most years when water temps consistently run from fifty-five to sixty-two somewhere up on the north end since it is shallow and stained. This warms quicker than the deep, clear southern end. Then in May the lake rises to summer pool throwing yet another curve in the whole crappie spawn.

I tend to look for crappie turning dark up near the Wilborn area first. You need water temps in the mid to upper fifties. Then I stay with those fish until the females have gone up several times and dropped eggs. You will know when to leave the area once you start catching male bass guarding those same spots. Usually you can stay in these areas for a couple weeks.

Then you can work your way south at every small cove with down trees in them to provide protection from the wind. The clearer water warms slower so the same spawn conditions you were experiencing up on the north end you will now find on the south end.

These are primarily black crappie so they will move shallow and stay much longer. I track these fish for another couple weeks then lastly I move up the feeder creeks to the extreme shallows.

For this pattern to start you need water and since the Corp drops the lake six-feet during the winter all the small, shallow creeks are empty.

Once they fill you will also have good weed growth with the abundant smart weeds and willow bushes. This provides protection for the crappie fry and the newly hatched shad fry. As long as the creeks don't become gin clear you can stay up in them and fish about two-feet deep until mid- June.

The crappie will remain after the spawn because of all the abundance of food. Very few boats go up there since you need to know how to navigate such a small stump laden creek.

That is the crappie spawn in a nutshell on Shelbyville, now go catch them because the lake is full of good sized crappie. Knowing where the best beds are and the best small spawn coves takes a lot of years on the lake.

This year marks my twenty-first as a guide and before that I grew up on Shelbyville since my parents had a houseboat on the lake and we spent every waking hour on it while I was young.

You can figure out patterns with the crappie spawn that will help you figure out this massive lake. Water temperature is very important as is the lake level. Crappie have figured out on this flood control lake not to drop eggs in a few inches of water like they do on a lake that has a fixed elevation.

I find that six-feet is where you need to start searching. You can catch them shallower but you need the water color suited for fish to hide and this lake is really very clear for the most part.

The best method to search for spawning crappie is a slip bobber rig and a lively minnow. I just hit down tree after tree until I hit pay dirt. A big male crappie will be all dressed up in his spawn colors or his body will take on a very dark color. The longer he has been shallow the darker he will be. Yet another way to move with the spawn. The darker males have been up there a long time so the females most likely have dropped their eggs and won't weigh much if you are in a tourney.

April is a long month that starts out very cold and ends up with almost summer like weather. I start my month out just like I ended my March fishing deep and staying with the more stable bite rather than chase shallow fish that are here one day and gone the next.

Like I said the lake has been drawn down shrinking the playing field so to speak. This pulls the crappie out of the deep coves they have wintered in out to the front of them and puts them tight to wood. The river channels will also hold an abundance of crappie on wood as well. They use the wood to draw heat from and for protection.

I set up my Yar-Craft walleye boat to allow three of us to set side by side up on the nose of the boat. This way we can hover right over deep brush. I use shorter rods so we can all stay in the cone of the transducer located under the trolling motor. This way I can keep an eye on your jig so you are fishing at the right depth. We fish vertical right down in the thickest brush you can find.

These fish suspend and you don't want to fish under them. A crappie has its eyes on top of their head so they feed looking up. They suspend because Mother Nature is warming up the top layer of water and they can feel even one degree difference.

I have my boat all set up with four Lowrance HDS units with both down scan and side imaging capabilities and all units are networked to share waypoints. This is important in early season simply because we can go down a steep bank loaded with down trees and pick out the ones that are holding fish and cut our search time down to nothing. Almost like cheating but worth every penny.

I also have my boat set up with on-board air and oxygen to keep my minnows so lively they jump out of the tanks. I have quick change disconnects mounted all over the boat so you can set your bait bucket down anywhere you want and have ample air. You must have lively big minnows to search for spawn beds.

If you want to catch a ton of crappie just look at my website for available openings and don't worry if you can't get in during the spring Shelbyville is by far the best summer crappie lake in the state. We limit out every day in July and August once the fish bunch up on main lake deep structure.

My contact info is [www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com](http://www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com) and just scroll down to see the availability list or simply give me a call at 217-762-7257 and we can set something up.