

Deep Summertime Crappie

by Steve Welch

For those of you who love the taste of crappie, but think they must wait until next spring to replenish their supply. I will let you in on a little secret. You can catch this tasty fish year round. I start fishing for them in early February, right after my last fishing show and stay out in the boat pursuing them until Christmas or some years even later. That means that a mere five or six weeks a year is all the time that I take off.

Catching them in summer is not unlike catching them in winter. These are the only two times that they actually school up. In spring and again in fall they come back to the shallows but they spread out. But in winter and summer you can get on them on a deep main lake ledge and literally pull a couple of limits from just one brush pile. Depth is the key, now in winter the fish will relate to the bottom but in summer you need to stay in the thermo cline where the oxygen is rich. On Shelbyville the lake that I do most of my crappie fishing on that usually means you need to be in at least thirteen feet of water and as deep as twenty-five doesn't hurt a thing. You must however have a steep ledge with some sort of brush on it. High clay banks or the steep drop off on a huge flat are the two preferred areas to start your search. Those of you who troll the flats for Shelbyville's white bass or walleye and wonder why every time you come off the top of the flat you catch a crappie. First off all this lake is just full of crappie but secondly you probably came off that flat near a brush pile. But also in summer crappie travel in schools in open water to make it easier to ambush prey and provide protection from the larger predators that roam this large Corps of Engineer Lake.

This might be intimidating to most fishermen trying to hold your boat out in the middle of the lake over a brush pile you can't see. Modern day depth finders and GPS units let you see even your tiny sixteenth ounce crappie jig and with GPS you can go back to within six foot of that spot time after time for the rest of your life. If you haven't gotten in on this new technology you are missing the boat. GPS is changing the way we fish just like the first depth finders did. I have a Garmin 240 on the nose of my boat and the only thing I do when I turn it on is go to the bottom zoom feature and turn it to the two times setting then I go into the sensitivity setting and turn it up one notch past the factory setting. If you turn it up to much it will look like it is raining on your screen with all the little lines that will appear. I try to see a second bottom, and then I know I have it set about right. If you keep your jig in the cone at this setting you can see it on the screen. Just watch the right side of your screen for new information and if you see a dark line just above the brush then quickly pull it up and let it fall back then watch your screen for that abrupt line going up. Wow you just saw your jig on the screen. Now you can put it right on a crappie's nose. I have a Garmin GPS unit beside the dash of my boat and another Garmin on the dash. I have chips in my GPS unit that give me detailed information about the lake. Like boat ramps and roads. When I find a deep brush pile I just hit mark then enter and it assigns it with a number. To go back to that same brush pile I just go back to the assigned number and zoom my unit all the way in so you only see your boat and your assigned number. Then when I get over it I look at my other depth finder to see if I am close then throw out a buoy. My GPS has split screen but for me the two systems working together works better. I have about one hundred and twenty spots at this writing but add new ones on every trip.

The tackle I use is a nine-foot custom rod in an eight weight. I have large spinning eyelets on it to let line flow through more freely. You say why would you still use a nine-foot pole when you are fishing as deep as twenty-five feet deep. I always keep my rod tip about a foot in front of my trolling motor so I can see my jig on the screen. Crappie are very depth oriented. You need to be slightly above them. I always stay with a sixteenth ounce jig. I believe you get more bites on the slower falling jig. But the problem is fishing such a light jig so deep and still being able to feel it. So I never use heavier than four-pound test in deep water. You get less line twist and you don't get the curling you get with heavier line. You can land big fish on light line in deep water because you get them up and out of the brush quickly. Reeves Lure Company makes the jigs I prefer. I use either a number four or two hook depending on the mood of the fish and the density of the brush. I use Southern Pro umbrella tubes or Bob Folder tinsel jigs tipped with a wax worm or small minnow.

So if you want to learn how to catch summer crappie I am taking bookings for Shelbyville outings and soon will be also doing two day trips over to Mark Twain another fine crappie lake.

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