

Early Season Crappie

By Steve Welch

For those of you dying to go catch some tasty crappie March is a very good month on Lake Shelbyville. This lake is an Army Corp flood control lake and hopefully it will be down to winter pool this year. At the time of this writing they are eleven feet above winter pool. The big flood in December brought it up twenty-three feet above winter pool so you can see how far they have dropped it and continue to do so at nearly six-inches a day.

Once we get close to winter pool the fish will pull out of the coves and position themselves out on river channel banks and points in the mouths of coves. They will bunch up and this makes fishing easy.

The water temps are still low so I am using jigs. I usually switch over to minnows during pre-spawn or about fifty-eight degrees. The fish will suspend tight to larger branches to get whatever heat they can get from them. So standing timber and big laydowns are their favorite early season.

I tell all my listeners that water temps are the most important key to this puzzle in spring. We use it to judge when we are in pre-spawn, spawn and we even use it to locate active fish during the early season bite.

Full sun is what you want when fishing in March and little to no wind. This allows light penetration to warm up the top layer. This is why standing timber is a good choice in March. Heavy branches will be a degree or two warmer.

So you must be armed with two different set-ups to fish in March. Start your day off tight lining a small jig and tube or try my Brush Bugs. I usually switch over to bug like baits in winter since the black crappie switch up their feeding habits from shad to bugs in cold water. Tight line these on points leading into coves that they will eventually go into to spawn. Look for big laydowns out in fifteen-twenty feet of water. Slow is the pattern so use as light of a jig as you can feel. I use Fireline Crystal 8/3 braid most of the year due to its' hi visibility, low line diameter and great feel.

I make my Brush Bugs in 1/8 oz. & 1/4 oz. and of course my Deep Ledge Jigs in 3/32, 1/8, 3/16, ¼ oz. I use the small 3/32 oz. when water temps are in the high thirties low forties.

As for what color to use that depends on water color but I will tell you on Lake Shelbyville you can find clear water somewhere and that is my preference since crappie feed by sight for the most part. This means fish mid lake to south end where it is much deeper.

In clear water I like to use pearl or white or pink or chartreuse and mix these colors up. In stained to dirty water I use orange or black or purple or brown mixed with chartreuse.

I said earlier you must be armed with two different set-ups and the second one is a light/medium action spinning rod spooled with light braid so you can feel the bites. We use a fixed cork and set it up at about two-three feet. We then stay way off standing timber in the mouths of coves or if you are on the north end right out on river channels since the lake is so low you can now see the defined river channels.

Below the cork we use a 3/32 oz. or 1/8 oz. jig so a small cork is best. I even go one step further and use an oval cork since it rolls over on its side easier than a round one. You cast this set up past the tree and then very slowly reel it back popping it from time to time. You need the braided line to feel light pick-ups. So you must keep your line tight to feel these bites. Some fish will hit as you slowly reel it back.

This pattern works best in late afternoon when water temps can climb ten degrees or more in a single day. Fish will suspend very high in the water column in deep water but they are very spooky so keeping back is a must.

We use this two pronged attack all through March and well into April, but once we hit pre-spawn I change it up but that is for next month's article.