

Early Season Crappie

by Steve Welch

Once the ice has left your favorite crappie lake here are some tips that I use to consistently put crappie in the live-well. On Lake Shelbyville, the lake that I have guided on some ten years now, right after the ice comes off the fish will move up into shallow water for just a couple of weeks. They love the warmer water temperatures and there are a lot of shad that has died and now the wind has pushed them right up to the shore. Big fish key in on this short-lived pattern.

Another good early season pattern is to fish out in the deeper heavily wooded coves or along the old channel up in the river and fish down about three or four feet deep even in twenty or more foot of water. This pattern seems to work best when your surface temperature reads at least fifty degrees and you have a sunny day. Pure sun is what I prefer early in the season. The dark bottomed bays will hold fish late in the day and the deep coves and channel edges early in the day. You must remain versatile this early in the year.

Here are some tips on fishing on an Army Corp lake. First during the winter they drop Lake Shelbyville from 599.7 ft. above sea level down to 594 which is almost six foot. That is a ton of water on a lake this large. You can however use this to your advantage. This congregates the fish, which can be very helpful in eliminating water. I am always looking at the last deep water the river fish have. This will hold big fish. I fish both rivers but it is usually the West Okaw that fishes better in the spring. I also fish a lot of the main lake sharp drops out on the vast flats. This is one of your best winter spots and if the wind is light you can win about any tourney one would enter this early in the year. Another good reason to get out early is to find you some new spots that will have plenty of water on them once the lake fills. Just remember to give any bank that looks like it extends well out into the lake, like a flat, plenty of room so you can hit bottom a long way from the shore.

The tackle that I use this early in the season will be vastly different than during the spawn. I use smaller baits early such as the Crappie Pro solid baits or a tensil jig made by Bob Folder or a hair jig made by Slaters. I stick with some shade of chartreuse and also use a lot of whites early in the season. The hair jigs and tensil are great to tip a small minnow on. I use a Powerbait Crappie nibble on my tube baits.

The poles that I use vary from eight feet in length all the way up to twelve. They all have their uses. I like the eight foot to toss a slip-bobber with and the twelve if I am fishing shallow and it is too windy to fish the slip-bobber. I use either a nine or ten if I am hovering over a ledge brush pile in ten to twenty feet of water.

For those of you who have attended my winter seminars you have heard me preach the praise of GPS. I am here to tell you that this is the best invention since the old green box. It has made my deep fishing game a lot better and I am constantly probing the deep ledges on Shelbyville and Kentucky Lakes looking for more brush. I can go out into the middle of the lake and stop within six feet of a brush pile and immediately catch fish. My fish aren't pressured by other fisherman and now every time I go down to Kentucky Lake I expect to catch two pound fish and have caught about a dozen or so this past season. GPS is only as good as the waypoints you enter in to it. You can use it for navigation but it is the waypoints that make it worth the investment. On every trip I take time to go out onto a sheer drop, throw a buoy at about the fifteen foot level, then motor down a hundred feet turn around and go down that same ledge again, throw a buoy, then you have a line to walk the drop with. If you snag a brush pile and catch a fish off it then hit enter on your waypoint and now you can come right back to the brush pile time after time and you have just eliminated water and increased your proficiency.

My guide service fills up very quickly and March certainly isn't too early to go. If you are thinking about booking a trip this spring you had better get on it as I have limited spots available. So give my service a call or just e-mail me and get yourself the trip you soon won't forget.

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