

Early Spring You Must Remain Versatile

by Steve Welch

I have been a part-time fishing guide for some ten years now and one thing I try and tell people who try and start out in this line of work. You have nothing without repeat business and the only way to have that is consistency.

I live between two great lakes, Clinton and Shelbyville but each is vastly different from the other. Depending on factors such as water clarity, wind for the day and just weather or not I am on fish at either lake affects my decision to take my clients to which lake. I usually have clients who let me make that decision.

Lake Clinton a nuclear power plant lake has its advantages because it has a hot water discharge section that opens up April first. You can catch yourself a smorgasbord of fish. If the crappie aren't biting then you can throw the two-jig rig or a gay blade for the lakes hybrid striped bass or white bass or walleye. They are all willing to hit this bait combination. But it is the crappie that I predominately search for. You can find water in the mid sixty range between the Dewitt and forty-eight bridge, other lakes won't have this kind of water temperature for a month or so. Crappie goes to the bank once the water hits fifty-five and there are plenty of downed trees between these two bridges for you to dip bait into.

Lake Shelbyville, one of the states largest and arguably the best crappie lake in the state can be hot or cold in early April. Cold rain can slow the bite and muddy water doesn't help either. Both of which are most likely to happen in early April. Once we get the water into the mid fifty range it doesn't matter you can get your limit on every trip. That happens about mid month. Once the bite is on I fish only Shelbyville for the next two months. It is a far better crappie lake than Clinton is. Hundred fish days are the norm like it should be in spring.

Remember a ways back when I mentioned consistency was the key to repeat business. Here are some tips that might help you in that department.

Water temperature means everything in April. A matter of three degrees can make or break a successful day. The crappie will suspend at Clinton or Shelbyville in the heavily wooded coves once the surface temperature hits fifty degrees. At Clinton you can be in jungle cove or sunfish cove and fish out in ten to twenty foot of water only about four foot deep hidden around all the hedge trees. This same pattern works down at Shelbyville in coves such as opossum or coon creek. At fifty-five degrees the males start to prep their nests and will be found along the shore but back on the first drop in the six to ten foot range. They will be on the bottom in this situation though. The females move in at around sixty-two degrees. But you can also look for fish down at Shelbyville to move up onto flats and to the back of creeks to search for the warm afternoon sun. All this starts anytime after the water warms up to fifty.

Long rods I am talking ten on up to twelve foot in length so you can reach back into spots where you would never be able to cast. We call it dipping for crappie. Be it live bait under a slip bobber or a jig under the cork. This method is deadly on both of these heavily wooded lakes.

Quality depth finder and even GPS can help you immensely. I hear all too often my units lie to me or I just don't understand how to read them. First of all they don't lie. You just need to interpret what they are saying. I can go on and on about how critical my unit is to me. I would cancel a guide trip if mine were broke down. I bounce from deep to shallow water on every trip. Fish just aren't in the same depth all over the lake. I am also a big promoter of GPS. I have over a hundred and eighty waypoints on my unit for Shelbyville alone.

You must have a strong trolling motor with good batteries. I have a seventy-four pound thrust and constant twenty-four volt. I can fish in any wind and hold there all day long a must in the spring when wind is always a factor.

I fish from a twenty-foot Ranger 520 bass boat with a deuce and a quarter behind it. That spells water coverage and very little wasted time between spots. But more importantly a Ranger sets low and hovers in the wind and provides a stable platform to fish from.

Lastly live bait. Even though I prefer to fish with jigs I know minnows are a great search tool and always have them in the boat on a guide trip.

If you want to see these patterns in action just give my guide service a call and set up a trip you

will remember for years to come.