

## Enjoy Fall Colors and Total Tranquility by Steve Welch

Lake Shelbyville my home lake has to be one of the prettiest lakes during the fall. It has trees on it everywhere and they turn the prettiest shades of red and gold. You top that with rarely seeing another soul and you have the makings of a good day on the water. I get that general reaction from my Chicago clients. The lakes up at home are so crowded.

The crappie fishing rules the scene down here in the fall. The bass tournaments are over, so they just put their boats away. The Muskie fishermen are down at the other end of the lake some twenty miles away. I have the whole north end to myself and a handful of die-hard crappie fishermen.

I simply love fishing for crappie from October through mid December. The fish are very predictable, the weather cooperates more than in the spring, and we do not fight fluctuating water levels. Lake Shelbyville is an Army Corp of Engineer flood Control Lake so in the spring they try to keep it at 594 feet above sea level or winter pool. To do this, they have to be constantly turning this lake into a yo-yo of water levels. This makes me work all the harder to find fish.

Not during the fall though. You just run and gun about thirty brush piles a day in various depths and wind directions and take a few legal sized fish off each one and before you know it you have a live well full of tasty crappie fillets.

The lake is full of standing timber; the underwater brush that is the best. They hold more fish and if you find new brush that is even better. I have as good knowledge of the north end of this massive reservoir as anyone on the lake. Be it a main lake drop, a creek mouth, or a winding, twisty run up one of our feeder creeks in just a few feet of water. I can get you anywhere they are biting. I have the most up to date GPS and electronic system on my boat to aid in relocating hidden brush. In addition, a good knowledge of the creeks, and when to fish them, since they muddy quickly or current changes in them and that moves the fish.

I fish out of a Ranger bass boat and for crappie fishing; they really don't make a better boat. It has a huge front deck and is very stable in rough water. We hover over brush and fish it vertically with ten-foot rods. You have to have a boat that will hover with little effort. High-sided light aluminum boats catch wind making it hard to stay over your brush. I also have a six-inch hydraulic jack plate on the back so I can slip up into the creeks in just a few inches of water.

I always tell my spring clients to call me in the fall and as good as, it was in the spring it would be better in the fall and winter periods. Those that capitalize on this have to agree. I have motored away from the dock, a hundred yards to my first brush pile, and pulled three limits of good fish off the first spot. During the spring, the fish spread out more. Therefore, it is very possible for two clients and me to cull a hundred fish in a single day. I have done it more times than I can count.

Here is how we do this. First, I have rods in the boat to fish to very different styles. As I said before we hover over brush so I have three rods spooled with six-pound Hi-Vis Trilene Sensation line. I like to see my line so I don't miss a bite. Any tick or hesitation for the line to stop dropping I am setting the hook. In deep water I use anything from ten to twelve foot long. I can reach most snags with the long rods and I can teach this method to anyone in minutes. On the business end, I have a sixteenth ounce jig and a tube on it. I like any color as long as it has chartreuse on it. I use Charlie Brewer Slider grubs for the most part and Midsouth tubes or Super Jigs. This the time frame that I get out my big baits though and will fish a tube three inches long. If this is the case, I will go up a jig size to get a larger hook. The bait fishes in the fall are larger and you will get bigger fish by up sizing your baits.

The second set of three rods that I use all have either a pegged cork on them or a slip cork. If it is a pegged cork then I am stump jumping up in the creeks and want to stay very far away and cast to these fish. If it is a slip cork then I am fishing brush and have to get it to slip into nook and crannies within the brush. Pegged cork, spinning outfits six and a half foot or longer. Slip corks I like a twelve-foot rod to just under hand toss the bait into brush. We do not really cast much just leave about fourteen foot of line out and toss it into the nastiest brush you can find. When you lift it out, you come straight up and out of the brush so it does not hang up. I use a cork just large enough to hold up my jig so when they hit it I know it.

I do a lot of traveling across the Midwest when I am fishing the Crappie U.S.A. circuit and my experience on how to fish shallow backwater creeks. Experience gained in my home lakes has served me well. Many tournament guys don't have this pattern on their home waters so they don't ever try it. Not only is it cardiac fishing because these shallow fish just attack bait like a bass would, but you hardly ever see a soul around.

So why not put down that shotgun for a day, or whatever fall activity that preoccupies your time. Give my guide service a buzz, and we can go get some of those tasty crappie fillets for your freezer. Along with the beautiful fall foliage and total tranquility, that is Lake Shelbyville.