

Family Fun on Illinois' Best Summer Crappie Lake

by Steve Welch

My spring trips have mostly all die-hard guy fishermen that are willing to brave the elements and I have no problem booking four months of them seven days a week. I tell all of them how good the summer crappie fishing is on Lake Shelbyville and yet they are skeptical. Like most of you they think the crappie just go somewhere and hide until next spring.

I am blessed to guide on a lake that has deep water and plenty of cool summer breezes to keep the fish active all summer long. Once the water gets into the eighties a thermocline starts to develop and this puts all the fish at the same depth all over the lake. Now imagine you and your family setting in my custom rigged Yar-Craft boat in a t-shirt and shorts and pulling in crappie after crappie all day long.

Kids young and old love these trips, tons of action and a very tasty reward. We simply target horizontal branches on trees in the 15-17 foot depth in much deeper water. Wind is a big key to our success as is boat traffic. The bait will roam out in the middle of big basins early in the morning and a light breeze or boat pressure will move them over to the shore with the wind blowing into it. Every day we have to spend some time re-locating the bait but once found the crappie are close by.

To find the bait I have on-board the best electronics money can buy. I have four Lowrance HDS systems. Two ten-inch screens and two eight-inch screens. All of them are networked and I have side and down imaging on both the front and rear of the boat. With GPS to mark waypoints so we can return to them at a later date. They are networked so if I find a spot I want to mark it is marked on all four units.

With side-imaging I can go down a steep bank and shoot it to the side and look at the end of every down tree on that bank and immediately see if any crappie are home. This really helps in eliminating water. The picture quality is amazing and it looks just like an oil painting of a tree with all its branches still intact. There will be white dots hidden within the tree and those are crappie. I can then move my cursor over to the exact spot I saw the fish and drop a waypoint on them and throw a marker buoy right on their head and have a fish in the boat within a few seconds.

Once we find the crappie we then get out my custom made eight-foot rods and spinning reels. We use such a long rod so your slip bobber knot won't be reeled into the reel where it will hang up. We spool the reel with fourteen-pound Fireline Crystal. It has a wax film to aid in keeping the bobber stop set where we put it. Then we run it to a barrel swivel with a quarter-ounce weight and a bead above it. The bead helps protect your knot when the quarter-ounce weight slams into the barrel swivel. I then tie on a foot of fifteen-pound fluorocarbon line which like the braid has little stretch. This helps in retrieving your snags. Under the leader I then tie on a number four Aberdeen hook. It is a small hook but anything heavier won't straighten when you get snagged and you will plenty. Then we use a Thill float big enough to hold everything up.

On the slip bobber rig we put on a lively minnow and lively is the key in the hot summer months so we rigged up my Yar-Craft with a nifty aeration system that has on-board air all over the boat with termination plugs in precise locations where my clients will be seating. I have three small coolers and a big 60qt. Yeti cooler transformed into a big bait tank. Plus we have an on-board twenty-pound oxygen tank to give those minnows that little extra and they are jumping out of the tanks all day long.

I also carry some of my Brush bug jigs in my clear water colors of tensile and flash-a-boo. I then swim them back and forth with my twelve-foot rod over the deep brush to entice a bite. This tag team approach is very deadly.

It is almost impossible to fish with me during the spring as I am booked seven days a week and easily booked four months in advance. During the summer months of July, August, September you can get in within a couple of weeks normally but I wouldn't wait. Weekends go much quicker as well.