

Crappie Fishing Ice Out Through Spawn by Steve Welch

Every winter I go to several fishing shows and give seminars. I have a calendar that I use to give my listeners a ball park idea as to what to do when they first get on the water.

For me on Lake Shelbyville it starts early to mid February when the ice comes off the north end of the lake. The south end rarely freezes. Lake Shelbyville is an Army Corp of Engineer lake that drops it's Lake Level from 599.9 ft. above sea level to 594 during the winter. This brings the fish to the outermost wood nearest the deepest water they have on the extreme north end of the lake.

As soon as the ice comes off they do a make shift run to shallow water and they suspend around the deep wood they have pulled out to during the winter months. I work both patterns as they as they are both close to each other. I throw a jig suspended under a slip bobber for both patterns. These fish are very boat shy and you cannot get near them.

I always tell my listeners that a surface temperature gauge on your boat is critical during the spring to put these patterns together. You are looking for the highest temperature, you can find, it will differ some ten degrees from the main lake to creek arm or back of bay.

I also tell my listeners that this is a couch potato pattern as well. Let the sun do its job, the best fishing is from one to four in the afternoon.

The make shift run to shallow water only last a couple of weeks after ice out but the suspending around deep standing trees last until late April. I will set my slip bobber anywhere from a foot to four foot deep even in

Once we get into the mid to late April time and you start to see surface temperatures around fifty to fifty-five. The males will start to take on the courting colors and get very dark around their face and sides. I then switch to my casting of the slider grub pattern. The fish are still spooky, by trying to tight line you will just get the little fish as the big ones will move away before you can catch them. The males are now in areas of heavy wood that extends out into deep water and back into the shallows. They will suspend about the four- foot depth. I tie on a sixteenth ounce jig and a white and chartreuse Charlie Brewer Slider grub in the two -inch size and I cast and count down the jig and run it by standing and lay down timber. The males are aggressive and readily chase bait, and with the water temperature about right to start building nests, they need to fatten up for the upcoming spawn in which they do most of the work.

About the First of May, we start to see some actual bedding going on. The surface temperature for the females to actually, move up to a bed needs to be around sixty-two to sixty eight. They will move in and out, so I now go back to both tight lining and cork fishing depending on depth and density of cover. This is the time to start to buy live bait. I have won many a tourney fishing live bait. Once you get into that sixty to seventy degree surface temperature, you need to try both live bait and jigs. We now start going up the reservoir as far as we can go.

On May 1, the Corp. starts bringing the lake up to summer pool and the fish will migrate up the creeks and this gives us longer spawn than most lakes because of the higher water levels. The creeks that were virtually empty now have channels of six-eight feet of flooded weeds to hide in. Even though the spawn is over the males will remain dark and the fish will stay until you do not see any bait, which can be as late as July 1. This is my favorite time of the spring fishing. Total seclusion, wind never a problem and you get the feeling that you are in the Florida everglades darting around all the creek bends.

Tackle, for all these patterns are simple. You need a good pole to both tight line and cork fish. I like a ten-foot rod with a good strong tip section to horse fish out of heavy cover. I use twelve-foot rods when the fish get very shallow so I don't spook the fish. I have a six and a half-foot rod medium action for casting the sliders, never to whippy on the tip. This doubles as my white bass pole. Always use a quality spinning reel with at least ten bearings and not the ultra-light reel. You need line capacity but more importantly, you need the longer spool for letting line out more smoothly. The extra bearings help with a smoother drag and it reels very freely, this helps to feel light bites. I like Pflueger reels but you pick what you like.

Midsouth makes jigs that I use. They are the "super-jigs" and you can order them from their web site www.midsouth.com. Anything chartreuse will do. The jigs that I use I have gotten them from Pam Reeves for years. She has an advertisement in this magazine under retailers. I use both sixteenth and eighth ounce and use some quarter in summer and winter. For my live bait, I use a number four or a number two Tru-Turn light wire hook and a shot just big enough to hold up my cork. I usually use a bigger shot and a bigger cork with live bait to help in getting snags free, that to depends on depth and cover. You never want to spook shallow fish with too big a cork.

Hopefully these tips will help you with your spring success and see you on the water and don't forget to give my guide service a buzz if you want to book a trip this year.