

March Crappie Could Be the Best Time

By Steve Welch

Most folks when they think crappie they think dogwoods blooming, water temps in the mid sixties and picking tasty crappie off spawning beds in less than two-feet of water.

Actually the early season can be just as good if not better. We get our first taste of spring in late March and the crappie react to this. They are still in deep water and schooled up making it easy to catch a bunch from just one spot. You can't do that during spawning time. They are spread out all over the shallow bays and backwaters.

The one difference in March and early April is nice full sun days. With light winds the sun can penetrate deep into the water and the crappie will simply rise up from their deep haunts and suspend sometimes right under the surface in thirty feet of water.

Lake Shelbyville where I make my living as a full time fishing guide has thousands of down trees and standing trees in deep water off river channels. This is where they take up residence for the winter. On dark miserable days they just drop down into that tree and don't bite very well.

But on sunny days they can feel that one-degree surface temperature difference and the feeding frenzy is on. Each tree is different because each has branches at different depths. The one thing in common they have is good depth. When they flooded this lake they left several standing trees on channel banks because they knew the lake would be flooded over the top of them. Those trees have every branch they ever had before the lake was impounded.

Since Lake Shelbyville is a flood control lake they drop it six-feet in winter and the standing trees on these channel banks that normally are in too deep of water now are perfect and it is in these trees that I get some of the biggest early season crappie I catch each year.

If I were to go back and keep records of the crappie I have caught on Shelbyville over fifteen-inches. Seventy-five percent of them came fishing very deep in March and early April. Most are very big black crappie and most have adapted to staying deep their entire lives. This is why they got so big; they really haven't seen many lures.

I love fishing this pattern; my boat is set up to fish deep with three seats up on the nose and the electronics to find their hiding spots. This way of fishing I was introduced to on Kentucky Lake years ago and I simply brought it home with me.

Down there we target channel bends and mouths of huge bays. Most look for man made structure and this works but if you can find natural stumps on the lake they will hold bigger fish. We look for the same thing on Shelbyville. I have side imaging on both the front and back of my boat and four Lowrance HDS systems that can show 2-d sonar, GPS, side and down imaging and they are all networked. You top this off with the scroll back image capabilities and you have a system that just allows you to do so much the crappie don't stand a chance. The pictures on these units are amazing. They look like an oil painting of a tree with every branch drawn in perfect detail.

I use my side imaging to go down a stretch of bank on a river channel and look for either down trees or standing trees with crappie hiding in the branches. Once I find some I drop a waypoint on them and proceed to hover over them and see how deep the fish are suspended within the branches. You might be in fifty-feet of water fishing a mere ten-foot down trying to come in contact with one of the horizontal branches.

We use my Deep Ledge Jigs, which are heavier to bump into suspended branches and make the crappie bite with a reaction strike. They also have a small number four hooks on them that will straighten if you snag a branch. We use 8/3 Fireline Crystal braided line to give you better feel and the power to snap your jig free from a branch. This system works great on both Shelbyville and

Kentucky Lake and this past winter the sauger fishermen have taken a liking to my jigs as well.

In fact everyone likes them so well we now offer them on my website on-line store and at four retail stores around Lake Shelbyville. We also go to the instate fishing shows and run a booth to sell even more of them. My website is called www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com and while you are in there you might want to book an early season crappie trip.