

May Spawning Crappie and Shallow Walleye

By Steve Welch

Every year is always different. Last year we had the warmest March in history and I was catching crappie on spawning beds. This I have never seen or heard of in Illinois. This year we have experienced a very cold April and a very wet one. I was just starting to get crappie in spawning areas and then the Corp dropped the lake two feet to get ready for the melt off of the thirteen-inches of snow we had and then was hit by a three-inch rain two weeks later with more rain to follow. Plus we had seventy-degree temps followed by twenty. Do you get the jest of what a guide deals with in April. We just can't wait for May.

With April behind us and warm temps that May brings we are full swing into the crappie spawn. Once the water temps get to fifty-five and we start to see overnight temps remain up in the fifties so we don't loose what we gained the day before the spawn is in full swing. For us that starts the last week of April and will continue on through mid May.

May also has a change in our seasonal rule curve. Lake Shelbyville an Army Corp Of Engineer flood control lake will drop the lake each year in December from 599.9 to 594 feet above sea level. I hear it every year when anglers come in March and look at the lake. Wow the lake is lower than it has ever been. My response no it is like this every year. Once we get to April they let the lake come back up two-feet to 596 then once we hit May it returns to 599.9

This and the warmer water temps bring the crappie shallow to spawn. It also fills the feeder creeks and the crappie will go up them to feed on all the shad that have also traveled up them. The creek shorelines are all lined with smartweeds so the shad have plenty of places to hide.

In my experiences from fishing spring crappie tourneys you can bring in some huge weights during the spawn and post spawn fishing live bait. Jigs work fine during cooler temps but minnows will out fish them during the actual spawn. I simply use a long 11-12ft. rod and a slip cork with a number four aberdeen hook and a lively minnow. This is where my new boat shines we rigged it with onboard aeration and oxygen ports so I can place a cooler wherever I want and keep fifteen to twenty dozen minnows alive and healthy.

It helps to a vast knowledge of fishing this huge reservoir and what to do in case of floods and where tons of spawning areas are. This is where I come in. I have been a fishing guide for this my 19th year and along the way you learn a thing or two. Plus I have over 2600 waypoints to run to on any given day.

The spawn will run way into May but once the water temps hit about 68 you will look around and it is over. Way before then I have switched my thoughts to walleye fishing. We have a small window to catch them and the tail end of May and most all of June is your best shot.

Like I said we are a flood control lake so a couple things must happen for a good walleye season. First we need the lake to be at summer pool or even slightly higher. Slightly higher will flood the smartweeds and the walleye will hide in them or just outside to ambush shad.

Second thing we need is the surface temp to hit seventy. This triggers the first of several spawn hatches that we have over a ninety-day period. The white bass will be moving out of the creeks as will the sauger and walleye and they will be hungry. The whites push the shad to the surface and attack them with a feeding show that you have to witness once in your life. We can park the boat smack dab in the middle of ten thousand whites and watch them hit anything that hits the surface.

Walleye and sauger are a little more like bass and they like to strike from the cover of stumps on points or on big sand islands that have scattered rocks or stumps on them. Typically they like a hard bottom so I target points with gravel or areas that have a lot of stumps close to deep water. This is why we have to have water to get the fish on these type areas. Too shallow and the only way you

can catch them are to troll and that can be a long day. The baits I like to use are my Deep Ledge Jig spinners and a small twister tipped with a piece of night crawler a Big Dude Blade bait my Candystriper or my new inline spinner. All of these work but some work better in extreme shallow and some in mid depth areas.

May and June on Shelbyville and the summer months are by far my favorite time to be a guide. The best thing and the toughest thing about guiding on a flood control lake is water fluctuation. But current keeps the fish biting all through the summer months where as other lakes become stagnant. Plus warm water temps in May and June have the fish really biting so get out there and enjoy the sport we all love. Plus feel free to go to my website and check for my availability and while you are on there feel free to join our fishing forum called Illinois Fish Talk.