

My Season Is In Full Swing  
By Steve Welch

Most of you by now know I am a crappie-fishing nut and spring is crappie time. I start my season in mid March every year and by first of April I am guiding every day and will not get a day off the lake until mid August. That is right close to 150 days straight, seven days a week. Most fish a week straight on their vacation and they are exhausted. You have to love fishing first and foremost but you also need to love people and for me it is dido on both.

April can treat you like you are an unwelcome houseguest. The start of the month can bring you some very cold rain and always wind. Then about mid month it gives you a taste of summer then back to freezing rain.

We usually limit out on crappie every day because I constantly fall back to March patterns and forget about the shallow fish. Even though you will have days that you can hammer them right on the bank and I get calls all day long of buddies telling me just that. I know after 19 years of guiding that their pattern is short lived until we get close to the end of the month.

Short lived due to the many cold fronts associated with early April and by just ignoring those phone calls and stick to those deep fish at the end of the day you will be fine.

In spring one of the most important tools on your boat is your surface temperature gauge. Until you get a constant 55 and start to see the male crappie get a little black going on under their mouth or their courting colors as we call them I FISH DEEP. Those fish aren't as effected by the many fronts you have in April and besides all the spring fishermen, boaters and bank fishermen alike are pounding the spots that will eventually have shallow spawning crappie. This leaves all the deep schooled up crappie for me.

The best part about spring crappie fishing on a big lake like Shelbyville is that you can fish several different phases of the spawn in a single day. The mid lake area around the RR bridge will show signs of spawning crappie first. Then as the lake starts to fill with warm rains the spawn will move north and finally the deep cool end, the south end will spawn last.

I like to fish the south end for my first month on the water, which starts in March, and then about mid to late April I will move north. The north end will be warming but with all the spring rains it will also be very muddy. Through the years I have grown fond of a certain water color and I just won't fish dirty water if I don't have to. That is the beauty of guiding on a lake that is some twenty plus miles long. You can find the water color that you know will have fish biting.

When our season starts jig fishing over deep structure is your best pattern no need for live bait. Myself and my two other guide boats all have our boats rigged with a three man seating system to allow all of us to jig fish straight off the front of the boat. Our guide service is unlike any other on the lake in this respect. I feel it gives the clients the best chance to keep up with the guides and it allows us to constantly keep an eye out on the client's bait because we can see it on the screen of our big Lowrance units.

When the shallow bite is in full swing I take out the three-man seat system and throw in several poles rigged with slip bobbers and then I start buying live bait every day. Then when we pull up on a brush pile I pull along side of it and use the entire length of the boat. This is when the third client isn't a problem for me. My boat is twenty feet long and I have seating for everyone.

After 18 years of guiding in a bass boat I am starting my season in a multi specie walleye boat and a tiller motor to boot. You heard me a twenty-foot Yar-Craft with a 200HP tiller. I made this move for my summer season and for my older clients and young children. Now I have more room down in the boat and seating for four including myself in nice set down seats. I switched to Yar-Craft simply because the Ranger tiller front deck just wouldn't due for the three man seating

system I wanted.

So in summary about April be prepared to move shallow once we get up to 55 surface temp. and stay there. Problem is we will see that temp. and then a cold front will hit and back it goes some five degrees or more. So fishing deep is a more consistent bite even though you will see anglers at the cleaning stations bragging about getting them in a foot of water. May is coming and you too will be fishing in a foot of water but for now putting three limits in the boat every day is the most important thing. See you guys and gals on the water and have a good season.