

November Crappie, What We All Are Waiting For

By Steve Welch

I do seminars all over the state and write columns and do magazine and radio interviews and the question comes up from time to time. What month is your favorite for crappie fishing? You might be surprised that it isn't May when the fish are on beds but rather it is November.

What I like about November is every pattern you want to fish is working. If you want to fish a cork in shallow water you can, and if you want to run mid depth brush piles that works as well. The thermo cline is long gone and fish are at all depths.

For those up north they think November is frigid cold and it can be towards the end of the month, but I have seen sixty-degree days even after Thanksgiving. Yes the leaves are all but gone but November can give us prolonged weather patterns with stable, sunny days. I usually start my day in my cover-alls then by mid morning I am in a light jacket.

You can look back the last few years on my website and notice trends. A bunch of the crappie pictures with three and four man limits are taken in November.

Enough weather talk, let's discuss terminal tackle and patterns. Like I said you could fish any pattern you want but now that my regular clients are getting older and I as well. I had a three-seat system made so my two clients and myself can all set comfortably right on the nose of the boat. Now all three of us are fishing the same brush and it makes it easier for me to keep us over the brush pile. I can actually see everyone's jig on my big Lowrance so I know if for some reason you aren't fishing deep enough. You see we all vertical jig right down into the brush or down tree and boat control is critical.

I give my clients a nine-foot Wally Marshall rod and I have an eight-foot rod. Since they are setting right behind me but have an extra foot on their rod it all works out and makes a straight line right in front of my trolling motor transducer. I spool these rods with Fireline Crystal 8/3. It is braided line and very strong. You can straighten or snap the jig free from most brush. Then the third part to the terminal tackle. I use my Deep Ledge Jigs, which are special designed jigs with a small hook on a quarter-ounce jig. This extra weight and small hook really helps in getting back your snags.

Well you might think a quarter-ounce is overkill. We fish a little different than most crappie fishermen. Instead of finesse fishing with a light jig in heavy brush we purposely run the jig into branches and then the fish hit it when it climbs over the branch. You can be very brave with my jigs. We also swim them back and forth in brush once you find the depth they are holding at. Another good reason for using my jig is that we fish all sorts of depths on Lake Shelbyville. One brush pile might be in six-foot and then move right to the next in twenty. Like I said in November they all hold fish.

Most of you on the northern part of the state don't know about the transformation Lake Shelbyville has gone through these last three years. We have been flooded for extended periods now for the last three summers. What this does is fill the lake with shad and all the species benefit from this. I have seen a ton of big crappie this fall with fish at or near two-pounds but the really good news is that all fish sampling and shocking surveys have told us that Lake Shelbyville will be the hottest lake in the state if not the entire Midwest next year for walleye. This bite starts about April and lasts for about three months. This year I had to pull off the crappie before the spawn was over to get in what I will say was the best walleye fishing Shelbyville has ever seen. We have a very strong class of sauger coming up as well.

Another thing most of you up north don't know is how good the winter crappie fishing can be on Shelbyville. Most years we don't even freeze over on the south end. No boats and the fish are all schooled up so you don't have to run more than a mile from the ramp all day long. I have caught

tons of crappie in weather topping out at twenty degrees. I keep my guide service open all winter so if a warming trend hits then don't forget about December and January.