

## **November is Always Hot for the Tasty Crappie**

by Steve Welch

I look forward to fall fishing each year. Finally the big boats are gone and even the bass fishermen have dwindled down to but a few. All that is left are die-hard crappie fishermen and oh of course the duck and geese hunters.

This year I look forward to November crappie more than ever. We have already had a great summer to fall transition and the fish are way bigger and heavier than most years. This is due in part to the new limits and more importantly the floods from the last two years. Shelbyville has always repaired any problem it might have with a good long period of high water. The food is plentiful and the fish reap the benefits.

This summer I have seen the biggest white bass I have seen in years and we were getting crappie in ninety-degree heat from just four feet of water in flooded willows. This fall the average sized crappie have been close to a pound and the lake is full of them. I can't think of a hotter lake in the state right now. Just think throwing back eleven and a half-inch fish, too small to keep. Hundred fish days are the norm for myself and two anglers, not bad and most call it the best they have ever seen. I pride myself in hearing those words from my clients and always go overboard to ensure it is the best crappie trip they have ever seen.

The crappies are stacked up in mid depth brush and you can get a three-man limit from your first stop in the morning. We have done this many times, limited out by eight A.M. This is why I love November crappie. It is better than the spawn in May due to a couple of important factors. Weather and water levels. In spring we are always confronted with cold fronts and cold rain and the lake bouncing all over the place. One day it is at winter pool then in just a few short days it is up ten feet or more.

November can have beautiful days, especially at the beginning of the month. The trees are turning and an occasional eagle flying overhead make for a Kodak moment. November can get chilly at first light but by mid morning you are in just a light jacket and the wind lies down for days and you can't find a more tranquil setting.

Once the surface temps fall into the mid fifties to high forties the crappie go on a feeding binge and all you need is a handful of your favorite jigs a long rod a good trolling motor operator that lets you hover over brush and pull the tasty crappie up and out of their hideout. The rest is history; limits are not just a pipe dream but an every day occurrence. Just look at the pictures on my guide trips just about all of them have November dates with triple limits.

Another favorite thing I like about November is any method you like to use to catch crappie works. I can get big fish up in the mouth of feeder creeks tossing a cork or I can hover over ledges and get into the mother load of stacked up fish and put numbers of good-sized fish in the boat. Once we hit the end of the month we are out on ledges but the fishing doesn't taper off. In fact we harvest them right on up to middle of December.

November is also my month to bring out the big baits. The shad that the crappies are feeding on are large, nearly four-inches in length and the crappies want a big meal. Midsouth Tackle has what they call an eighth ounce tube. It is two and a half inches long and it flat out catches bigger fish. Besides it keeps the pesky yellow bass and small fish from biting it. Colors that I use depend on watercolor. If it is clear I will use a pearl color or light blue. Stained water, something with chartreuse and just about any other color. Dirty water it is always brown and chartreuse or black and chartreuse.

November is also the month I get out the Bighead jigs. Oddly they work the same way as the larger tubes. The fish can just see them better. These jigs are quarter-ounce aspirin head jigs that have a big profile. If I am probing a ledge I always have one on. The fish just nail them way

harder than a normal jig. You team this up with braided line and the bite will jar you clear up to your elbow. I use 8/3 pound Fireline crystal. It is supposed to be the only braid that disappears under water. That I don't know but I do know I can see it very well. That is important in crappie fishing because they will hit a bait on the fall and spit it back out before you ever feel it so I am always watching my line where it enters the water. Any slightest tick I set the hook and listen for that two or three inches of drag to slip from my spinning reel. I always keep it loose enough to hear a slight slip of drag. This way if you hook a real big fish you know where drag is set. I tend to bend their eyes back on my hook sets. I have had anglers fishing beside me jump out of the way on my hook sets. They can't believe I set it so hard since all they have heard crappie referred to are paper mouths. If you get a good quick hook set you will find that jig right in the top of their mouth right into the bone. No way are they getting off.

One thing I must apologize to my clients for these past couple of months. My nine to five job has switched from a service job in the Champaign-Urbana area to a project coordinator on huge construction jobs. Since the economy has plummeted the company that I work for has went more into the commercial end of plumbing and heating. We build motels all over the country and I am responsible for the heating and air conditioning and desert air systems for the indoor pools. I am presently in North Platte Nebraska way to far to come home for weekends.

I really had no choice in the matter since I am still too young to retire and just fish full time. The money is very good but the headaches from being the head of such a big project can overload you. I was told that my latest endeavor would take just two weeks to rough in and I would have a huge crew. Well I am on my fifth week and have a couple more to go.

My wife has been thrust into the bad guy position of calling and either canceling trips or rescheduling them without really knowing when I will be home. The only good news is that when I get a motel roughed in then I have two or three weeks back in town and I can guide most every day even during the week. Then I go back for final trim then on to the next project. So please have some patience with her as she is really a saint and has this burden of running everything in the household thrust upon her as well.

We might try just getting people on a call list and trying to get them in once my schedule dictates me being home. So don't hesitate to call as the fishing is very good and you will be thankful you called.