

Shelbyville Fall Crappie (Red Hot)

© Steve Welch

A couple of years ago we changed our crappie limit from ten fish ten inches in length or longer. To ten fish ten inches in length or longer and an additional five fish that must be under ten inches in length. This was done to help cull out the smaller black crappie and give more food to the larger survivors. It was said we don't have a fish problem we have a food problem. That is apparent if you were to fish Shelbyville this summer. All the trees in the mid lake to south end coves have fish on them right now and September is the best month we have for this bite.

Another way for Lake Shelbyville to repair its fish and food problem is to flood the lake. This is exactly what has happened the last two years. The lake goes from 12,500 acres to about 22,000 acres. We have been up as high as 16 feet last two summers. There are plenty of places for fish to hide and better yet for food to hide and reproduce. Shelbyville has more food in the water than I have ever seen. Lots of food means fat and healthy crappie.

Last year I had to cancel tons of trips as the water just stayed muddy for weeks or even months, this year different story. I have been just tearing up the white bass in August, getting two hundred fish every day by 7:30 then packing them on ice and placing them in truck to keep hot sun off them. Get twelve dozen minnows and some slip bobbers and plain gold hooks. Hit the willows, then hit the standing timber. A hundred fish later clients just shake their head, crappie in summer.

The white bass have always loved a hard bottom in flood years. We locals are used to this but who would have thought that you could catch fish on flooded concrete boat ramps. They get moss on them as water drops and this attracts bait, which attracts white bass. They also love gravel boat ramps, hard bottom. Just look for bait on depth finder screen and visually look for bait. Willows that have wind on them are loaded with whites. I have been smack dab in the middle of ten thousand whites busting on surface and have them stay on top for three hours. Fish every cast, three guys in the boat over a hundred an hour, you get the picture. My best trip was 306 from an anchored position before nine o'clock. My biggest were pushing three pounds but had many trips with thirty or more two pounds apiece. This was no doubt the best white bass fishing this guide has ever seen.

Those that know me and come to my winter seminars have heard me preach and preach about the Gay blade as my best white bass lure. Well no more, the Blue Fox Vibrax number two, number three, and number four in the chrome color. This bait flat out catches those big fish. I fish it a couple of ways. Long cast let it fall almost to bottom, reel it four or five cranks as fast as you can then let it fall for two count then smoke it again. A couple of times doing this is all it takes. They either hit it as it falls or shortly after you speed it up. Big fish hate this and slam it so hard you just about lose the rod. The other way is just to make long cast count it down then reel it steady just fast enough to feel blade turning. Of course everything has to be set up just right prior to launching. I use a seven to seven and a half-foot rod with good backbone and fast tip to load up extreme casts. Always spooled with ten-pound braid. Can't really tell you what brand as I am still on the fence as to which one I like. I can tell you with the whites I change it about every two weeks. I know it has no memory so why would you change it so often. It does get kinked and it does come off spool and loosens on spool and then you look down and you have a loop reeled up on spool. Best thing I can tell you. If you use these spinners that I use or any other brand. They put twist in the line and when you least expect it the knot will just break, losing an expensive lure. I run a barrel swivel on them and this has almost eliminated me from losing them. Another good little hint is once you make that long cast and don't throw it a mile in the air. It must be a line drive and just a millisecond before it hits the water throw the bail in gear. This takes out all slack and you never have that annoying loop on your reel that you just put fifty feet of line on top of it. Hence there is your new kink.

I like white bass fishing but after five thousand or so I am bored with it. I can crappie fish all year and never be bored, but hey that is me. I crappie fish on vacations, I crappie fish nearly year round on guide trips. I just love the whole puzzle. What depth are they at today, what is watercolor, water temperature. What is the food doing, Things I ponder as I try to sleep. You see I am ate up with it. Drives my wife nuts. Even after fifteen years as a guide it is my passion. (CRAPPIE NUT).

The fall slash winter pattern is my favorite. It starts in September with the water temps falling and the bait moving back into the larger coves. The bait will be just under the surface once the water temps fall into the low seventy and even lower range. The crappie lurks under the bait. This starts my first fall pattern, I call it the pendulum pattern. You stay back thirty feet or so from a standing tree and under hand flip a jig six to ten foot past your target. Kick your reel in gear, hold your pole at about three o'clock and watch the line for anything that isn't normal. Crappies nail your jig on this pattern but distance is the key as the watercolor is so clear you spook the bigger fish. I usually use eight-pound braid but I am quick to break out my four-pound fluorocarbon. If I am not getting as many fish. Jig weight depends on wind, watercolor, or fish mood. I start with an eighth ounce then drop to a sixteenth. I never fish the little thirty-second or go up to a quarter for this. I use both tubes and sliders for this. Watercolor dictates my tube or slider choice. I start with a color made by Midsouth Tackle. It is a very light blue almost pearl color or Phyllis calls it number 111. White works to or pearl, you know clear water clear bait choice, stained water switch to something chartreuse.

This pendulum pattern is my favorite way to catch them. Clients catch on very quickly and most have never tried this or even thought of it. Remember distance is the key. October is another pattern completely as water temps will plunge and fishing gets even better if you believe it. Hence the puzzle continues.

I still have many good dates left so give me a shout and let me turn you in to a crappie nut.