

Spring Crappie, No Better Table Fare

By Steve Welch

I start my guide season way before April because for me crappie fishing is a winter sport. Others however have different opinions so crappie it is until end of May.

April will have you scratching your head. The month starts out like winter and ends up like summer. You will see fifteen to twenty degree surface temp. changes and that will most definitely change the crappie location and mood.

You can get in on the start of the spawn at the tail end of April on Lake Shelbyville. Last year we were hammering the first wave of males coming to the bank before the flood. The north end muddied up so bad we just packed up and headed to the south end and stayed down there for nearly two weeks.

For the most part in April I am fishing just like I do in February and March (Deep). The deep fish aren't effected by the many fronts you have in April. It is easier for me to teach a novice crappie fisherman how to tight line over deep structure than it is to flip a cork shallow. So I always opt for easy. Besides it is the only time frame that all the hi-tech electronics I have on the boat come into play.

I use a four-part system in catching deep winter crappie. Part one I get a good topo map, which I have on my GPS. I use the Navionics Premium but the Lake master works equally as well. On these maps I locate river channels and more importantly channel bends that sweep right by a high bank for wind protection. The huge schools of bait on Lake Shelbyville use the river channels to migrate with the wind and currents and crappie lie in wait to ambush them.

Part two is use my side imaging to scan all the down trees on the channel bank looking for smaller branches out in deep water. Within these small branches you will see crappie and clouds of bait. I then mark these spots with my GPS to return later.

Part three I switch my unit over to down imaging this is not to be confused with regular sonar. Both side and down imaging the pictures you see actually look like the real objects. With my down imaging on I then return to the GPS waypoints I just dropped. Once over them I look for crappie suspended in the branches. Then I freeze the screen and move my curser down to exactly where these fish are located. I then get an exact depth to fish. I then toss out a marker buoy and I now have the depth and the GPS coordinate. Bottom depth means nothing because you will find trees in thirty to fifty feet of water with branches just under the surface.

Part four is to switch my electronics over to regular color 2-d sonar. I can see my jig on the screen much better with the bigger cone you have on sonar. Seeing your jig is critical because we are trying to line up with branches. These branches have crappie using them for ambush locations.

This is where my Deep Ledge Jig really shines. We had a mold custom made to perfectly balance the jig and to give it inset eyes so you can put hi-vis eyes on it. We make it in four different weights all in the big aspirin style head. It is the 1/4oz. that I use most of the time. I want a jig I can feel and the big profile really gets the bigger fish. I use this heavy jig all the way to four-feet of water depth then I switch over to a lighter one because I like to throw a cork. For me it is not about fall rate but more about a big jig that I can bump into brush without getting hung. Bumping it into deep brush will trigger strikes and if you get hung up I use braided line to add better feel and superior strength. I then just pop the rod tip hard and free the jig.

Like I have said April will throw you curve balls but the deep bite is consistent and May is coming. Then we will get right on the bank.

For those of you interested in getting any of my lures I have a new on-line store on my website at

www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com. Then once you are on there feel free to join our new fish forum called Illinois Fish Talk. It is packed with how-to info on several different lakes in Illinois and surrounding states.

If you happen to be near Lake Shelbyville I have my baits in several retail locations such as D&M located in Sullivan and Chip's Marine located at the Bo-Woods boat ramp and lastly Atwood Armory located just north of Atwood. We will be adding more locations soon.

Also we are booking guide trips every day so don't hesitate. See you on the water.