

Spring Crappie Lake Shelbyville

By Steve Welch

This year 2015 marks my 21st year as a professional fishing guide. Mother Nature and I go round and round every year and April can be one that really tests my nerves.

March can actually be better if you catch a couple days of sun but like this year March has been ugly as well. I tried to guide down on Kentucky Lake in late February and early March and they ended up with as much snow as we had so that too was a bust. Mother Nature wins yet again.

At least in April it isn't snowing or at least I hope it isn't. What it does is soak you with cold and I mean cold rain at the beginning of the month and smother you with bright sunshine and warm days about mid- month.

April is what I call pre-spawn and spawn for the crappie on Shelbyville. Water temps need to be about 55 to get it started and 62 has the females moving up. Those temps can be found on Shelbyville by end of the month if you know where to look.

Lake Shelbyville is a massive lake with shallow, stained areas on the north end and sheer drops with clear water on the south end. The lake is nearly thirty miles long counting all the feeder creeks and has tons of coves that the crappie love to spawn in as well.

Year after year this lake gives up tons and tons of crappie and it just keeps on trucking. It is so full of crappie that we tend to limit out for the boat about 97% or better all year long, including dog days of summer.

I do have years of personal knowledge about the lake but can put together patterns pretty quickly that will translate all over the lake and that is the sign of a consistent fisherman.

At the beginning of April I know that the north end of the lake will warm up some ten degrees one day then lose all that the next. This confuses crappie that just want to do their thing and multiply.

I stay fishing deep mid lake to the south end just like I did before the ice came on and in March when it came back off. These are spots that the crappie have lived in all winter.

These spots are deep points with stumps out on them in at least twenty-feet of water and entrances to coves with both stumps, standing timber and down trees on the points leading into them.

The lake has been dropped six-feet during the winter and this pulls fish out to front of the coves on onto main lake river channels. I happen to know where several standing trees exist that were left out on the main lake right on the edge of river channels.

Anything horizontal on a standing tree that is down about 10-20 feet and any stump in about twenty will have fish suspended above them.

Fish will move up and suspend higher in the water column when the sun is shining so all month we are catching suspended fish.

Once I start seeing males with dark bellies on them I move back up north and get out the slip bobber rods. I believe a minnow drifted over a spawn bed will out perform a jig. We then fish for spawning fish for the next three to four weeks by traveling to areas that warm slower thus extending the spawn. Plus the lake is coming back up to summer pool so this also gives you more spots. We try and stay with 60-65 degree surface temp so a temp. gauge is very valuable in spring.

My Yar-Craft 2095BTX back troller is set up to guide from. First of all I have no steering wheel console to get in the way. My boat has a 200hp. Tiller on it. Then I added two extra pedestals up on the front deck to allow my customers to set right next to me as we hover over these deep brush piles. This way I can watch your jig right on my Lowrance depthfinder and this is how we catch those suspended fish. We can see them on either my sonar or my downscan since I run two Lowrance HDS eight-inch units side by side on the nose and two more HDS ten-inch units on the back. All are networked to share waypoints and all of them have both side imaging and down scan capabilities.

Then we added on board air system to allow you to set your minnow bucket anywhere in the boat and simply plug it in. This way you have tons of air to keep your minnows alive and that is key in the summer months.

The side imaging is extremely helpful when these crappie are suspended out on the ends of down trees or just above stumps. I can drive by them some 60 to 100 feet away and see them as plain as day and then scroll over and drop a waypoint on them plus get a depth that they are suspended at.

We then use shorter rods with a ton of back bone. Shorter rods so I can keep them in the cone of my sonar to watch our jigs and plenty of back bone so we can pull our snagged jigs free.

I make a special jig just for this called the Deep Ledge Jig and it weighs 1/4oz. and has a small light wire hook that can be straightened. We also use Fireline Crystal 8/3 braided line so you can really get a hook in those big fish since you have no stretch.

As for colors on my plastics weather it is a Midsouth tube or a solid bodied shad style bait that we just started handling. Water color dictates that. I never just have one favorite color but more than likely I have about ten in the boat at all times.

I like shad colored and clear baits that sparkle in clear water and I try and fish that color of water if I am fishing deep. If fishing up on the bank I want stained to almost dirty then something with chartreuse on it will suffice. My jig heads come in about five colors and I also match them to water color darker colors in darker water.

Even though the crappie spawn will continue on into May I tend to switch up to walleye after about the tenth of the month. Those elusive fish become easy to catch for about a month then disappear so we get on them. Crappie can be caught all summer no problem. Lake Shelbyville is by far the best summer crappie lake in the state due to its' depth and wind that pushes bait around.