

Spring Crappie Fishing, Everybody's Got The Bug

by Steve Welch

This year is a little different than last for me. My phone has rung off the wall with everyone setting up early and I mean early Crappie trips with me. People are starting to listen to my seminars and read my articles about the two main patterns that you run into this early in the year.

Both of these patterns need two things. Good full sun and a surface temperature gauge on your boat to capitalize on the good full sun. In March the difference in a good trip and a great trip is persistence. I have spent a half-day searching all my best brush piles when all of a sudden the sun has finally done its job and the fish just turn on.

The best places to look for fish this early are big coves or bays or channel edges. All must have standing wood, which isn't a problem on Lake Shelbyville, the lake that I primarily guide on. In the big coves and bays you need to look at the first break that have trees on it. I have seen fish up in just a few feet of water if the color of the water is dark enough. You need to move very quickly to either capitalize in on this pattern or eliminate it. My best water temp. For this to work is fifty degrees. You can see these shallows warm up ten degrees in a day under full sun so it doesn't take long after ice out for this to happen.

The other location you need to look at is the outside channel edge of the West Okaw river channel up on the extreme north end of the lake. This is my favorite pattern. You can hit the mother load on this pattern. I have had three man limits in only an hour of fishing.

The Army Corp of Engineer pulls the lake down five feet in the winter to get ready for the spring rains. This exposes all the trees on the old river channel. The fish will suspend beside the standing wood in ten feet of water or so and they will suspend down only a couple of feet. Hence the need for full sun. This brings the fish up and gets them active. You can also make the quick run to the end of the lake or as far as a boat can go this early in the year. The shallow mouth of the Wilborn Creek area and the surrounding bays can have good numbers of fish in them early in the year. This whole basin isn't any deeper than four feet so caution must be observed.

Both of these patterns that I have talked about today aren't to be confused with the spawning run. Mother Nature hasn't got that going yet. This is more of a food run up into the shallows, but you need the best sun you can get and a couple of days of it even better.

The spawn on Shelbyville won't start until about the third week of April once we get consistent water temps of about fifty-five degrees. The males will start moving up and preparing nests. This will continue on until about mid June. Longer on this lake because it is a flood control lake and as it floods to summer pool this brings more fish up into the shallows. Quite a long season for shallow Crappie fishing. Up early in March, back somewhat in April to deep water then back up towards the end of the month and remain shallow until almost until July fourth.

I mentioned in the last paragraph that the fish pull back in April somewhat. Lake Shelbyville is a flood control lake and it can get dirty and affected by all the cold fronts as all the spring rains hit. So for me as I am a multi-specie fisherman I switch lakes for about a month.

The other lake that I guide on is Clinton Lake. It is a nuclear power plant lake and they have a section from the Dewitt bridge some four miles up to the forty-eight bridge that is closed to boat traffic all winter long to protect both the waterfowl that live on the lake all winter long and also the fish that love the warm water.

I call it my smorgasbord guide trips. We cast shallow for Walleye but you catch a lot of different species of fish. On a typical day you can expect some good Channel Catfish a ton of White Bass some Hybrid Stripers a few Largemouth and Smallmouth and Crappie. If it were five years ago you would also get some Tiger Muskies, but they no longer are swimming in our lake. I have a ton of good stories to tell about them though. Including two that jumped into the boat and that gets your attention for sure.

The tackle that we use for the Crappie is quite simple. Since we are shallow I like a twelve-foot rod rather wimpy so you don't pull the hook out on the hook set. We also use eight-foot rods with slip-bobbers on them again so we can stay back from the wood. I use some sort of chartreuse tube jig on the business end. I prefer the tubes from Mid south since they are much more durable and larger than most other tubes. I also use Southern pro umbrellas since they have a large profile. Both on sixteenth ounce jigs and six-pound hi-vis line.

For casting up on Clinton Lake we use the standard two-jig rig. Which is two quarter- ounce jigs tied a foot above the other with either a three-inch twister on both or a sassy shad on one or both. I also like a quarter ounce jig with a Charlie Brewer slider grub on it. I catch a ton of fish on this bait and you will

hear me speak about it all year. It for sure is my confidence bait. Another good confidence bait is the quarter-ounce Gay blade. I always have one tied on when I am fishing shallow water. You can throw it forever and it has a ton of flash and flat out catches everything.

I want to emphasize that at the time of this writing the lake is flooded and coming down about six inches a day but it has eighteen feet to go so these patterns on Shelbyville will vary this year. We can expect good fishing though these floods give the fish plenty of new food and water to grow in.

I still have plenty of good date's left so call and book your trips soon.