

Spring Crappie, Right On The Bank

by Steve Welch

I look forward to May every year. The Crappie are on the bite and Mother Nature has finally let go of her grasp on our weather. Yes our cold April rains give way to warm seventy-degree days. Sure it might rain a little but now its warm and the fish are committed to reproducing and very aggressive.

Lake Shelbyville the lake that I have guided on for ten years now, has got to be the best lake in the state for catching lots of eleven to thirteen inch fish with an occasional really big fish. Not to forget about all those throw backs in the nine to ten inch range. Yes, in May you can up your own size limit to eleven inches and still get your limit. We actually get our limit on every trip out from mid April until mid June not to mention a hundred throw backs and those spells action. Weather or wind doesn't matter I just know the lake and have been under the gun hundreds of time to produce for clients and you wouldn't be in this profession for a decade if you can't produce.

Let me give you some insight on how I remain productive. First Lake Shelbyville isn't Lake Clinton the other lake that I guide on. Clinton Lake has a more stable water pool level which allow fish to get right up on the bank in just a few inches of water to prepare their nests. At Shelbyville an Army Corp of Engineer flood control lake. The lake level can fluctuate from 594 feet above sea level. All the way up to 618 feet above sea level at flood stage. That is twenty-four feet. Since this tends to strip the bank on the main lake the fish will back up and spawn in about six-foot of water. Up in the river though the fish will still get right on the bank and use anything they can find. I catch fish out of weed growth, wood you name it. Only prerequisite it must be shallow.

I love to fish this pattern. Up in the river caution must be taken not to get too close to the fish so we use a slip bobber and a jig under it or even better a spring cork affixed just a foot above a jig. With the spring cork you can pop it or slowly reel it away from the cover and entice the fish to strike and strike they do. A pound plus Crappie can hit a bait in a foot of water like a Bass. Once the spawn starts to wind down we just switch to minnows under a cork. The fish will remain up in the creeks clear up into July if the food is available.

Out on the lake we use a long ten-foot rod to hover right over the downed trees and brush and just wait for that tap and set the hook and swing the fish into the boat. This method is extremely easy to catch on to and I have many first timers put a limit of fish in the boat. The secret is boat control. I tell all my listeners at my winter seminars that a good trolling motor operator is worth their weight in gold. You can't get down into the brush if you can't hover.

I have mentioned the poles already so lets discuss what to put on it. I use tubes made by Mid-South available at Reeves Lures or Mike's Tackle both of which have ads in this magazine. I also use Southern-Pro umbrella tubes for their large profile. The colors I use are any variation of chartreuse like red and chartreuse or white and chartreuse you get the picture. We also use a minnow on a plain hook with just a split shot pinched on a few inches above it. No need for a cork on the main lake as we are hovering and the wind will blow your cork away from the brush.

Here is another reason to visit Lake Shelbyville over the next three months. Mid-May starts the migration of Walleye up onto the main lake flats and these fish will be up in shallow water until August. This is the only time frame of the year that I actually switch away from Crappie. I can put about twenty eyes in the boat on any given day not to mention a ton of White Bass and Largemouth. These Walleye range from fourteen up to about twenty-six inches. We use GPS to mark all the stumps on these huge flats and then mark them with a buoy and back up about fifteen feet and cast a jig and twister tipped with a crawler and swim it right through the roots of the stumps. This method is very effective and my clients love to catch Walleye south of Minnesota.

I still have many good dates left if a guided trip is to your liking. I have many customers come back year after year and tell me that their outing with me was the most productive trip they had all year.

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