

Willows Everywhere Where Do I Start
By Steve Welch

Lake Shelbyville my home lake is an Army Corp flood control lake and that means they will hold water to help flooding down stream. This gets water in the willows that surround the lake. Question is where do I start. There is over 190 miles of shoreline and willows everywhere.

First you must determine if you are in the pre-spawn to spawn mode or are you in a food and comfort mode.

If you are in a spawn mode crappie and bass like to spawn in a secluded area that gets full afternoon sun and little wind. The sun can penetrate the water and warm it up very quickly. These areas exist in the larger coves with little cuts within the coves or stretches of willows that get full afternoon sun and little wind. We probe through them with a twelve foot rod and a slip cork and a lively minnow set at about a foot deep. These fish you can leave the jigs home they want a minnow. They have been guarding nests and are hungry. The long rod allows you to put your bait in the tiniest little whole in the flooded matt or up under a willow bush. We just call it dipping.

Water color is another factor as to where you will find these spawning willows. Too dirty and the eggs won't get the nutrients they need for that first couple of weeks. I am always on the run looking for that perfect water color. We get a big rain and you are back to square one.

Lake Shelbyville has two big rivers that feed it and several small ones. When we get a big rain like we did a few weeks ago. The lake came up 12-14 feet. I know from past experiences to run south. The main rivers are on the north end I want as far from them as I can get. Lithia cove even though it has a creek feeding it is big enough that it stays clear most of the time. Then I start looking for coves with no feeder creeks and checking to see how run-off effected them. Like I said always moving during big rains looking for that perfect water color.

Now I also know that field tiles feed the feeder creeks up on the north end and they run clear and that along with current will clear up the creeks in just a few days so back north we go to get above the main lake to find that perfect water color in the creeks. We stay up there while the dirty water filters itself south towards the dam.

Then they decide to stop pulling the lake down and we get the perfect storm. Great water color everywhere and high water on the willows for extended periods.

Now the spawn is done and the lake remains high because the Corp can't flood the farmers fields below the lake. So you start looking for willows that will hold food.

These willows exist on the main lake in areas that get a lot of wind and have deep water very near. I like willows that have at least four-feet of water on them and aren't to thick meaning the bank is close by. Willows on points are also a good starting spot.

We are still using a slip cork and a lively minnow because the hungry crappie are in these wind fed willows looking for shad. Tall willows provide better shade and that will become more important as we get closer to summer. The crappie will remain in the willows all summer as long as the Corp doesn't fluctuate the water. Like I said it can be the perfect storm if you a fishing guide. Easy pickings all summer long. Not just for crappie but walleye and bass use them as well.