

Winter Crappie, Can Be Great If You Take Precautions by Steve Welch

I love to crappie fish during the winter months. Most that do this are your best and most die-hard fisherman. Everyone that I guide during the three weeks before and three weeks after Thanksgiving goes away with a whole new outlook on winter fishing.

Depending on Mother Nature I normally stay out in the boat until Christmas or shortly they're after. I would stay out longer but that is my seminar touring period from early January through early March.

Winter fishing on Lake Shelbyville has a few things that you cannot see any other time of the year. Many times my boat is the only one in the parking lot. Many times I see eagles circling and twelve thousand acres of lake to myself.

The boat rides can be very cold so we just trailer to the area that I am fishing. That way you never go more than a mile all day. I bring along a heater to keep your hands warm and if you have good hunting clothes you will be warm. I however prefer a quality snowmobile suit over hunting gear. They have bigger pockets and are roomier to put on layers under it. Plus it is easier to get in and out of. I believe in insulated wool gloves over other quality fishing gloves just because they repel water well and you can warm them up on the heater without melting them, also a quality hood and faceguard of some sort.

A cell phone and a boarding ladder are also a must. I went out of the boat last December and without both I probably wouldn't be here writing this article. Put your keys in a safe place other than buried in your pants pocket. If your hands get cold you can hardly get them into your pants to retrieve them. We put them in my boat glove box along with the cell.

Put together a small tackle box and store it in a compartment that never freezes shut. I use my glove box no carpeting. You need very little tackle. I have about three colors of tubes, same with Charlie Brewer slider grubs, and Berkley power minnows. All three, in some variation of chartreuse, chartreuse and white, red or black depending on water color. I also like Bob Folder tensile jigs and Slater's tensile jigs. The jigs are both sixteenth and eighth ounce, which one I use depends on wind and depth.

I never go heavier than six-pound test but in the deepest part of winter, I drop down to four-pound test. It simply fishes deeper without curling and twisting as much. I use Trilene Sensation Hi-Vis, but will change to a clear line in the dead of winter, if the water is very clear. I like the new transition line that is red on the spool and disappears once it hits the water.

At Shelbyville once, we hit the mid November period. I have no more cork poles in the boat. Just three ten foot rods with good sensitivity and sturdy enough that a client can't break it. I use both B&M and Wally Marshall. My rod is a custom blank made by Paul Center in Bloomington. It allows you to feel the jig come over a branch where as a less experienced fisherman would think it was a fish and set the hook. Snagging the jig ten to fifteen feet deep, very little you can do then.

Last winter a good buddy of mine called me and asked where he could find some fish knowing it was time and I would be on them. Well without giving up any of my spots, I let him in on a great pattern that happens just after Thanksgiving every year. Just go out from a sharp dropping bank until your depth finder says ten-foot. Then parallel the bank paying attention to anything on the bottom. Fish an eighth ounce jig and a large two-and-a-half-inch tube right on the bottom.

I checked on him later in the day only to find out he had bigger fish than I did just because the area I pointed him to had no visible cover and no boats had been fishing it. A quality depth finder and a fisherman that can run a trolling motor and hover the boat without all the swaying back and forth is all you need.

I have a Lowrance 102c on my trolling motor and just by zooming in one time you can see your jig on the screen and by how dark of red you have on the screen you can tell if there is fish in the brush. I have

another Lowrance 332c GPS unit back at my dash and just on Lake Shelbyville alone, I have 150 waypoints with brush. Once you get the hang of it you can return to these spots within six-foot forever.

Winter crappie isn't for everyone and you have to be a very dedicated fisherman to try it. Just ask any pro-fisherman anywhere around the country what they fish for during the winter months to stay keen on finding fish and learn more about their electronics. They will tell you, the tasty crappie that they are fish for.

Give my guide service a buzz and let's go before the snowfalls. If you need a seminar speaker I am available for that also. www.lakeshelbyvilleguide.com