

## Winter Crappie Time for Wall Mount

By Steve Welch

I get these questions all the time, when is the spawn and when can I catch the crappie shallow. This always depends on a few things. First, water temperature needs to be in the low sixties and second, is length of daylight and when is your full moon. That can be anywhere from late April until late May on Lake Shelbyville and earlier or later depending on what portion of the country you live in.

Then I start telling them that crappie are very active in cold water and your best shot at getting a big wall hanger type crappie is in the winter. Anglers are so trained into thinking. Let's go crappie fishing the dogwoods are blooming and they must be on the bank. Crappie are only shallow for about three weeks in the spring and three in the fall. So if you call yourself a crappie fisherman and shallow is all you know then that nice boat you have sure sets a lot.

Learning to catch crappie deep will improve your fish catching ability on several other species as well. When I am researching a new lake I look at many things. What is the primary food source gizzard shad or threadfin or both and how abundant are they. We here on Lake Shelbyville are too far north for threadfin to survive our winters so gizzard shad are our primary food source. Problem is they grow very large and the crappie can't feed on them all year long. But since the crappie can't eat the gizzard shad all year and we have very harsh winters with long periods of ice. We rarely see crappie over two pounds but don't get me wrong we do see some and plenty of nice pound plus fish. To get that true wall hanger you need threadfin because they stay small and are loaded with nutrients. This diet is way better than switching over to small bugs like the crappie will in winter up north.

Another thing I like to check is all the topo maps I can get ahold of. We sort through old 1930's topo maps and then lift the old creeks, roadbeds and anything else that we think will help. We then transfer that info over to our Lowrance HDS systems and use the many trail colors and icons to identify each thing we want to check out.

Is this lake you are going to a flood control lake and if so, this should pull crappie out to main river bends and concentrate the fish. Navigation can be tricky on these lakes but like I said we have mapped everything out and staying away from shallow areas is easy.

Now we are on the water and the first thing we want to look at is water color and water temperature on the surface. I find anything above 37 crappie will be very active. I want a little stain to the water and in winter that can be a problem. Most lakes really clear in winter. Lastly with my sonar and side imaging I am looking for food.

Once I find food I am looking for natural cover such as stumps or big and I mean big down trees with little branches and for the most part the big trunk is all that is left. Both of these need to be out on the main river channel on some sort of a bend. Now remember we are not looking to catch a boat load of crappie we want a wall mount.

Big crappie are loaners and truly believe they are bass and the top predator in the area. They don't want a tight brush pile to hang in they can't turn quickly. If you do find them near one they will be suspended above it or out in front of it.

With today's side imaging units you can easily locate the type areas I have mentioned and now it is time to get a bait on that big fish's nose. Once you locate some spots and have GPS coordinates it is time to get out the rods and lures to catch them.

I don't care about spot-lock on that new trolling motor you just got the technology just isn't there yet to hold you on a dime and that is what you need. I use a Minnkota 101lb. Fortrex cable operated foot control unit and I can keep you on a dime in three-foot waves if need be. Even me when I get to a spot and locate my stump or whatever it is I throw a buoy every time. The GPS will bounce around and your waypoint might jump twenty-feet so a buoy is always needed.

I have a couple of tricks on my buoys. First the weight they come with is always too light so I get rid of it and put on an eight-ounce catfish weight. This gets that buoy right down where I put it. Second if it is rough and the buoy is coming unwound with the waves after I drop it and it gets all the way to the bottom I then pick it up and put a big rubber band around it. This won't allow it to unwind but rather it will sink on waves then pop back up thus staying in place.

Now it is time to fish so I get out my best medium heavy action seven-foot walleye rod and an ultra-light spinning reel spooled with Fireline Crystal 8/3 braided line. With this set up I can keep my jig in my cone of the transducer under my trolling motor and thus see my jig all day long so if I need to fish the top of a brush pile I can. Those long crappie rods aren't needed when you are fishing twenty feet plus. A shorter rod will give you better feel and set a hook in these deep fish way better.

I use a special handmade jig we call the Deep Ledge Jig. My partner and I designed it and it has a flat top on it and is perfectly balanced to hang horizontally. It weighs a full 1/4oz. and has a small number four hook on it to get into brush without getting hung. The flat top makes it easier to spot on your electronics and it actually mimics ice fishing after a while. You can see fish move in and they have different colors just like when ice fishing.

Since I am a fulltime guide and always have two other fishermen in the boat besides myself I wanted to see their jigs as well so we put in two extra pedestals up on the nose of my Yar-Craft 2095 BTX tiller. This way I can keep an eye out on everyone's jig to make sure we are all at the right depth and like I said sometimes that might be six to eight feet off bottom.

I have several places where you can stop by and see me and attend our seminars in February and they are as follows.

Tinley Park High School February 8-9

Atwood Grade School February 23

Elmwood High School March 1-2

All of these schools are raising money for their sports departments and their bass fishing teams so come out and support them please.

All these spots you can go to my website at [www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com](http://www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.Com) or Illinois Fish Talk my second website for more info.