

Wow Spring Has Arrived, Finally

© Steve Welch

I am sure most of you have wet a line by now and found old Mother Nature sure is kickin your butt. Well good news is coming and that is spring. I love spring and hate it as well. Cold fronts, way too much rain. Wind that will capsize most small watercraft.

April always has me dreaming about May but oh well it can sure be better than March. March fishing has been typical for Lake Shelbyville this year. Beginning of the month we finally reached winter pool then boom. Four-inches of rain and we already had six-inches of snow on the ground. All of it melted resulting in a flood. Lake came up seven-foot back above summer pool. Well let's start the whole process over again, as we don't want it up to summer pool until May. Two weeks of pure mud on the lake and finally the upper end is getting clear enough to fish. Providing the wind doesn't blow you off the water and oh yeah it is still April and Illinois so don't rule out another snow.

I know I sound a little down but winter around here can do that to a fisherman. Good news it is close and I mean real close to the spawn and a crappie fisherman's dream. We rule in the early spring. My phone rings off the hook with clients, newspaper articles, radio interviews, magazine interviews and just plain folk wanting to talk about crappie. I have slowly crawled into your lives as the top crappie expert in Illinois and I thank you my readers for that.

Another reason I might sound a little down on Illinois weather is that I have spent the better part of the month in Tennessee. I have tasted spring, seen seventy-degree weather, and witnessed trees in bloom and flowers up. I love March on Kentucky Lake, especially down at Paris Landing in Tennessee. It is just far enough south to get winter but not much of it. Those of you who always go in April and May, believe me the last part of winter fishing down there is fantastic. The fish are in the same pattern I fish in April. Channels with tons of brush. Schooled up deep and hungry. Get a day or two with light winds and you will never see crappie fishing this good anywhere in the country. We brag on seven fish tourney weight of seven pounds or more. Down there you better have twelve pounds to just cash a check let alone win anything.

Lets talk about April and how to attack it on Lake Shelbyville or just about any of our major flood impoundments in the state. All the Corp lakes are at winter pool and believe me this helps us. It concentrates the fish. On Shelbyville the fish will relate to channels and rip rap. Channels are highways and good quality deep water and riprap warms quickly. Mouths of good, deep coves is also a good place to start looking.

I have two patterns in April that just murder crappie. Out on the channels is where I start my day if the wind is down. You can just move up and down from twelve- feet to sixteen- feet and hover over cover with a small jig. I don't get too big with the offerings in April as the fish have been feeding on small microscopic bugs all winter. Color depends on water color as always. Darker if the water is dingy and lighter if it is clear. Really anywhere you were fishing in late winter is a good place to start as long as it has wood and deep water.

The second pattern depends solely on Mother Nature. You know that lady who has given you a hard time all winter. A good warming trend with two or more days of full sun will get the fish to suspend over any cover or standing trees. I like to mark several brush piles at once and stay back and throw a cork with a jig under it, pegged at about six-feet or shallower. The fish will rise to get it. Standing wood you can fish even shallower, maybe just a foot or two. Just make sure you have fish in the area on the standing wood and the wood is in deep enough water. You know ten-feet or more.

A third pattern inters the scenario about mid month. The water has to warm up to the mid to upper fifty range and get the males thinking about the spawn. I simply take off the cork and cast a jig up into thick areas of both standing timber and brush. The trick is to keep your rod tip high and only cover that same four-foot top layer that you were with the cork on. With this pattern you can just cover more water and the water has warmed up enough that the fish aren't so sluggish and will chase down bait.

Now if I am fishing this pattern it requires a switch from tube jigs to slider grubs and switch from my ten-foot dippin rods to a spinning outfit. The Charlie Brewer Slider grub with that little paddle tail just drives fish nuts and I think it out fishes any twister on the market. This is also my white bass and walleye search lure on flats.

April can really throw you curve balls but just maybe the weather will cooperate just enough to put some tasty crappie fillets in the freezer and don't forget the spawn is next month and we will really be knockin them dead.

I have tons of good trips left for summer whites and walleye and crappie combos if anyone wants to give me a call. My summer white bass trips will leave you awestruck if pure numbers of fish is what you are after. Kids just love these trips.