

Early Season Crappie

by Steve Welch

My home lake of Lake Shelbyville is an Army Corp of Engineer flood control lake and each winter they drop the lake from 599.9 ft. down to 594 ft. above sea level.

This will move the fish and pull them out to channel ledges and some have standing timber on them, which makes it easier to target.

Right after the ice comes off the lake the fish will make about a two-week migration up the reservoir, right on up to the skinniest water they can get into. This pattern works best on two or more days of full sun. Full sun is the key to good fishing this early in the season as we are talking mid February through mid March.

You must downsize and throw small tubes under a cork, as the fish are very spooky. I use a number six hook on my sixteenth-ounce jig as well. Light four-pound test line, small corks so you don't make a big splash and stay back and throw to any piece of wood you can find.

Once you get past the ice-out pattern I just talked about then you need to fish more traditional patterns. The upper end of the lake has standing wood in ten to twenty feet of water and the fish will suspend sometimes just under the surface. Water color has a lot to do with just how deep they will suspend. Dirty water they might only be down less than a foot in twenty foot of water. This pattern too you must throw a cork and stay away from your target.

Out on the lake I am targeting old river channels and sand bars, both have very sharp dropping ledges. This pattern since the only cover is right on bottom you need to fish down on bottom as well. We sneak along the drops and hover over brush and fish small jigs and tubes tipped with crappie nibbles.

Everything must be fished slow and light line also helps in presenting the bait correctly. I use the new Spider wire Crystal in the six- pound two- pound diameter.

Depth you are targeting on the north end of the lake is a minimum of fourteen feet deep. Fish will move up to shallower on sunny days but out on main lake it will still be ten-foot.

Most fishermen will tell you that a cloudy day with a hint of rain is the best. Well not this time of the year. Full sun two or more days and light winds so the sun can penetrate the surface. This gets the fish active.

Colors of tubes that I use depend on water color. Clear water has me using the pearl and silver sparkle or emerald blue shiner tubes or the Slater's tensile jigs. Stained water I like the chartreuse and almost any other color like white or red or lime green. Dirty water has me using chartreuse and black or brown or purple.

Lake Shelbyville at winter pool is full of areas that require caution as it has stumps out on shallow sandbars that you can hit. Always swing wide of any flat looking bank. This is also a good time to get out there and get you some new GPS locations and get a better understanding of the contours of this massive lake.

With the new GPS systems with high definition mapping showing contours old channels and old road beds you can get off shore and find those secret fishing spots.

The best part about getting out there and fishing this early season crappie season is you are getting out there and the spawn is a coming.