

Finally its Crappie Time

by Steve Welch

Even a die-hard crappie guide like myself has to fish for other species during the summer months. Lake Shelbyville the lake I spend most of my time on these days has a tremendous white bass population and there is no better species to fish for during the heat of the summer. They bite well and fight harder pound for pound than just about any fish going.

Early in the month in October I will still be chasing the whites. They migrate to the back of some of the large coves on Shelbyville and this is a great time period to hang a big musky as well. The crappie wants the water temperature to drop down below sixty and stay there. I always take the clients on what I call combo trips early in October. We fish for what is biting. Whites one day, crappie the next or both.

Once we get close to November then no more white bass fishing for me it's crappie time. I always tell my listeners during my winter seminars if you want a great fall crappie experience then target the time frame of three weeks before and three weeks after Thanksgiving.

From about the end of October until about Thanksgiving we will be fishing very shallow. The crappie migrate up the creeks and move right up to the shore line very close to where they were spawning a few months before. We stay back and throw a jig under a cork be it a fixed cork or slip bobber. For me it depends on the cover as to which cork I use. The jigs that I use I get from Bob and Pam Reeves. They make a very good jig and I use plenty of them in white, chartreuse or hot pink. Sixteenth ounce gets the nod for most situations. I put a Southern Pro umbrella tube on it or a super jig made by Mid-South. You can't go wrong with some variation of chartreuse. Our water is what you would classify as stained to dirty.

Another bait that I use quite frequently is the Charlie Brewer Slider grub. I catch about every thing that swims on this bait. I use just two colors, the white and chartreuse and the creamy chartreuse and black. But of course if you are fishing shallow and the crappie have migrated to the far reaches of the lake in search of shad then you can't go wrong with a plain old minnow and aberdeen hook and split shot. I am even particular about that set up. I always use a small number four tru-turn hook and open the spread on the hook just slightly. This allows me to fish a smaller hook so I don't get hung up quite so often and by opening the gap I don't miss as many big fish. This also weakens the hook so I can straighten it if I do get hung up. The split shot should be large enough to keep your cork mostly sunk so the fish doesn't feel the cork so easily and the wind doesn't catch the cork and blow it away from the cover. I also tend to by the largest minnows I can get in the fall. A three-inch minnow isn't too big.

This time frame is when all the crappie tourneys take place on Shelbyville and it isn't unheard of to average a pound apiece or better for your tourney stringer. I have seen and caught some crappie right at the two-pound range and pictures of a fish that was caught this spring that was nearly three pounds.

Once Thanksgiving hits we switch to tight lining and hovering over deeper brush. Its not that we can't get some shallow but we have beaten them to death by now and the shad is mostly gone in the shallows. I love this pattern and it is very easy for me to teach a rookie how to fish this way. It is all about your knowledge of the lake and how many brush piles you can hit during the day. I have a vast knowledge of the lake and have nearly two hundred brush piles on my GPS to use at my convenience. I also have what my buddy Jerry calls the aircraft carrier for a boat, nicknamed after my front deck which is huge. I have a Ranger 521 with Mercury 225 and we can cover lots of water.

The tackle that I use is a nine to ten foot rather stiff rod so I can set a hook and these deep fish. I spool it with Trilene hi-vis sensation line in six-pound test. I want a line I can see. Crappie will hit bait on the fall and you must be able to see it or you will miss the fish. I still use the sixteenth ounce jig and tubes like I do under the cork but in this colder water I also use a hair jig made by Slater's and a tensile jig made by Bob Folder. The smaller less active presentation will trigger big fish. I always have my crappie nibbles handy and even have a box of wax worms; both work very well and will get you more bites.

You might think this type of fishing is just to cold for you to try, believe me if you dress in layers and protect your face we bring a propane heater to take the chill off your hands. It isn't that bad and when you look around and see maybe a dozen boats at the ramp and you have twelve thousand acres of water to cover it is quite serene.

At the time of this writing I am packing to leave for the Crappie U.S.A. classic over in Indiana. I qualified on the semi-pro side and am looking forward to a week of pitting my knowledge and skills against the best crappie teams in the country. Who knows thirty-eight thousand bucks isn't a bad payday for a crappie fisherman. Wish me luck!!!!