

## Get Rid Of Those Winter Blues, Try An Early Crappie Trip

by Steve Welch

These past few weeks the phone has rung off the wall with people up north with the early season fishing itch and up there they have no water to fish as of yet. I live between two very good lakes too fish in the winter and early spring. Lake Shelbyville and Clinton Lake. Both are very different, Shelbyville is very large and the south end is wide open so it takes very cold winter to freeze it. This winter it never froze completely. Mostly because of the high water that we experienced. As of this writing the lake is up nineteen feet over winter pool and dropping about six inches a day.

Clinton Lake is a nuclear power plant lake and unlike the power plant lakes up north it has no closed season on it, but rather a closed section on the lake where the hot water feeds into it.

The winter crappie fishing at Shelbyville on some winters is very good if the roads are clear enough to tow the boat to the lake. I can remember just murdering the crappie in January just a couple of years ago. This year the high water has slowed that up. By March though the fishing should be under control.

I like to fish a couple of different patterns early in the season. The deeper coves down the lake will have fish suspend in them along the standing trees. For this pattern you need to watch the surface temperature gauge on your boat and fifty and above seems to be about right. You get in a bay with no wind and a couple of days of full sun and it doesn't take long for this to happen. You can keep your boat back and fish a jig under a cork at about three feet. This pattern will work in water twenty foot deep or so.

I also like to fish the extreme upper end of the lake and look for fish to be on the outside edge of the old West Okaw river channel. They too will suspend but the water isn't as deep. If it is too windy I will also bring along a twelve-foot rod to keep my bait right next to the trees.

I can also make a short run up into the skinny water at the very north end of the lake and check the water that is only a couple of foot deep. The fish will use this in the afternoon.

Depending on the elevation level of the lake on how far up we can go. Later in the spring we go way, way up the creeks and prolong our season on into mid June to stay on shallow fish.

This shallow bite isn't to be confused with a spawning run but more of an attempt to get into a little warmer water where the food might be.

I have had guide trips where we totally have blanked in the morning only to keep moving and like magic the water warms up and during the afternoon bite we boat a hundred fish. This early in the year I definitely want full sun and noon until dark.

Clinton Lake unlike Shelbyville is a nuclear power plant lake. So it has hot water flowing in it all winter. The crappie fishing is up and down so we come prepared to switch over to casting for the smorgasbord of opportunities that the hot water section of the lake has to offer. April first they open the hot water section and let boats go right up into the warmest water. The water in the discharge will be about seventy degrees already.

I tend to stick to Shelbyville in March then switch to Clinton for about a month once April hits. For one reason the cold spring rains can hurt you at Shelbyville and the fluctuating water levels, but the bite at Clinton is a hot one and although I would rather be crappie fishing you can't ignore hundred fish days no matter what they might be. The gay blade and the two-jig rig will catch you a multitude of fish, including walleye, white bass, channel catfish, large and small mouth bass, hybrid striped bass and of course the ever present drum, carp, bluegill.

The tackle that I carry in the boat this time of the year is three twelve-foot rods, three eight-foot rods for slip-bobbers and three spinning outfits for casting the gay blades and two-jig rigs. I have six pound test hi-vis line on the crappie poles and eight pound on the spinning rods.

I carry a variety of tubes for the crappie. Midsouth tubes are my bait of choice and I also use Southern Pro umbrella tubes. I use Reeves jigs on the business end in sixteenth ounce.

For the spinning outfits I use quarter-ounce gay blades in chrome and blue or chartreuse. I also use a two-jig rig which is a pair of jigs tied a foot above each other with either twister tails or sassy shads or one of each. I also like quarter-ounce jigs with a Charlie Brewer slider grub on it. I use this bait most of the season. It is my go to bait on both shallow flats and later when the fish are out on the ledges. I have caught whites in twenty-five foot of water vertically jigging this bait all summer long.

I pride myself on being a multi species guide and can't resist a good bite. If you are getting the early season bug then you had better get on it as my trips fill rather quickly. I still have several good

crappie trips left and a few of the Clinton smorgasbord trips. This year you will also see me talking more about the tremendous white bass fishing that Lake Shelbyville has to offer. I am also expanding into Musky fishing and I look forward to hanging into a few big skis this season. I will soon have a web-site up and running and will also include it on my next month's report.