

Let's Set the Record Straight, Fall Crappie Is the Real Deal

By Steve Welch

I just replied to an e-mail that booked a trip for the fall on crappie and his reaction was that of concern that crappie bite in the fall. I am going on your recommendations. Most think it is some sort of stigma that you fish for crappie in the spring and then they just vanish.

Once the water temps get back down into the low seventy range or mid September. The bait start a movement from the main lake basins back into the coves. The mid to south end of Lake Shelbyville where I make my living these days is full of coves that are deep out in the front and have plenty of standing trees and sharp drops along the shore. This is where we start our long crappie season called fall crappie.

I absolutely love fall crappie. Stable weather, very few boats and gorgeous scenery. Most anglers that book me during the year and some point during the day ask me if I hunt as well and my comment to them is miss out on the best crappie fishing of the year no way. I am a crappie fishing fool. Besides they taste much better than a deer steak and two hobbies of the magnitude that I get involved in. No way could I afford it.

Like I said we start out in deep water in September then about mid October the lake temps get down into the mid fifties and the fish get back as shallow as they were during the spawn. Bet you didn't know that. Crappie fishing back on the banks and easy pickings. Then about mid November they move back out to where they were in mid September, deep wood and down trees on main lake along river channels. This is where they will spend the winter.

Let's talk about the start of fall crappie. I start out in mid September doing what I call pendulum fishing. Clients love it since we are still casting or something close. We simply use our ten-foot rods and let out about fifteen feet of line and just under hand flip it by a standing tree and on tight line and with your rod held still you just watch the line pendulum back until it gets under your rod. Most trees will only have a fish or two so we stay on the move and fish a hundred or so in a day's time. I like an eighth ounce jig but sometimes I switch over to a sixteenth if the fish are finicky. I use a Midsouth tube and fill it with crappie nibbles with my bait pump. We never need live bait since the fish hit this on a reaction strike since it is swimming by them.

Then we get more into October and water temps will have some fish schooled up on main lake down trees. I use my Humminbird side-imaging unit to side scan trees and see if fish are in the many branches out in deep water. Then we hover over them and tight line by fishing vertical down into the deep trees. This is my favorite time of the year. I have a custom made seating system that allows myself and two anglers to set right up on the front of the boat. We all use shorter eight-foot rods that have a good backbone and not too soft of a tip. No need for ten to twelve -foot rods because we are fishing deeper than they can reach to free and snags. You get better feel with the shorter rod anyway. Now why use custom eight-foot rods over simple spinning rods just a foot shorter. I can line them up just in front of my trolling motor and still be far enough in front of it that I don't get line in the prop, but more importantly I can see all three jigs on my big Lowrance that has it's transducer on the foot of my trolling motor. That way I can keep my eye out on a client who isn't paying attention on what depth they are fishing. Depth is critical when you are vertical fishing. You have to right down in the tree branches.

This brings me to the rest of my deep fishing tackle. Like I said we use stout custom made rods. We use these so we can free the jigs that are buried in wood. I use Fireline Crystal 8/3 braided line on my deep rods. The braided line lets me pop the jigs free from cover. Mono has stretch in it and you can't get your jigs back. I also make a special jig for fishing deep called a Deep Ledge Jig. It is simply a quarter-ounce jig with a small number four light wire hook on it. We put the tube keeper on the back side to compensate for the small hook gap.

We constantly fish depths of fifteen to twenty five feet deep on the main lake down trees so my

heavy jig can feel cover better than a lighter eighth ounce jig. Feel cover is the key. I urge clients to move their rod back and forth once we get it set to the right depth. This makes the jig hit branches and then you pull it over them and once you fall off the back side of the branch the crappie nail it.

I am blessed to guide on one of the hottest lakes in the Midwest. We have experienced high water for three years now and this allows the bait and the fish to get fat and healthy. I saw it this spring and this fall shouldn't be any different. More fish at or near two pounds than I have seen in years. The best thing is the over all average. We see twelve-inch fish all day long and it is nothing for myself and two anglers to bring in a hundred fish a day.

All the products I talked about in this and many other articles can be purchased on my website. My Deep Ledge Jigs shine in deep, heavy cover and the bait pump is the real deal for getting scent into the bait that will stay on longer. I have a whole line of how-to DVD's and my latest bait is a white bass / walleye catching fool. It is called the Candy striper and we have probably brought close to ten thousand white bass in the boat this summer with this bait. It has caught on like wild fire and everyone is throwing it on Shelbyville and it is spreading. So just go to my website and look around. You can read over a hundred articles, since I have been a fishing guide now for sixteen years and you pick up a trick or two along the way. There are tons of happy customers showing off their catches and soon I will have a full listing of all the shows I will be at this winter. www.LakeShelbyvilleGuide.com