

March is Mother Nature's Teaser

By Steve Welch

I love March; it gives you a taste of spring then takes it away and reminds you we can still have snow storms and even worse, ice storms. It seems the worst storms of the year roll through in March.

That taste of spring is what we are going to focus on. Any three or four day warming trend spikes the crappie's feeding behavior. The surface temperature will warm quickly and this causes the fish to suspend just under the surface along side standing timber. They can feel the timber giving off heat as well. Through the years I have noticed that fifty degrees on my surface temperature gauge is a tell tale sign that this is going on. To catch these fish you need a spinning outfit and a spring cork set at about three-feet. You fish this rig along side deep standing wood very slowly with a sixteenth ounce jig and tube under the cork. These fish are very spooky so long casts well past your target is the key and keep the boat way off the target as well.

However this isn't the only way to catch crappie. Probing their deep winter holes is still the best way day in and day out. On Shelbyville that means the very end of down trees on high clay banks that drop straight off into deep water. That isn't all you need to really be successful though.

I have really keyed in on this pattern over the last three years, as the lake flooded the last two years. The downed trees are the easiest way to stay on top of the fish. A brush pile will have fish on them if it is the right depth but if the lake rises or drops the fish will leave.

A downed tree can have brush at several different depths and the fish will simply move up and down it as the water rises and falls. Another thing I key in on is my GPS mapping. I target trees on the channel side of the lake and more importantly, any place the channel swings away from the shore, or if there is a small cove along that stretch of shore. I target the points on both sides of the cove before you go into them. These small coves offer that little three or four foot depth change. That is another key. Any quick change in depth with cover on it will hold fish.

Now remember, Lake Shelbyville is a flood control lake, so in March it is as low as you will see it all year long. That means it's time to get out the GPS and mark spots for use when the lake rises. Stumps on points are my favorite. They won't hold as many fish as a downed tree but they will hold bigger ones. Other species also inhabit these stumps so be ready for a musky or a bass.

You must also remember that the deep fish are still sluggish and they don't want your bait to move much. Boat control is the most important tool you can have. We hover over these deep spots and probe the deep branches with my deep ledge jigs. It is merely a heavy jig and a small number four hook that bends easily to allow you to pull free from the many snags. The jig I use is a quarter-ounce flat-sided jig that swims over these deep branches without getting hung up all the time. Running into these deep branches and feeling your jig drop off the backside of them is what triggers most strikes. That is why I prefer the heavy quarter-ounce jig. I also use braided line to enhance my feel and to allow me to snap my rod tip and free my jig. I even go as far as when I tie on a new jig, I bend the hook gap out and in a few times breaking the temper of the hook. That makes it easier to bend, thus getting it back once you get hung up.

As always my tube color depends on water color. I have a tackle box with three rows of tubes in it. I start out with light pearl colors that mostly mimic baitfish and end up with dark brown or black mixed in with chartreuse. I like March because the spring rains haven't started yet and the water is typically very clear. So my tube of choice for the most part is a light blue and pearl speckled tube spiked with either a crappie nibble or a gulp wax worm. I started using these last year and have found they work just as well as the crappie nibble but stay on the hook much longer.

Like I said, March can be Mother Nature's teaser, but I have had trips in March that blow away the trips in April. You must have that stable warming trend though, so it is hard to schedule guide

trips because the weather can turn brutal in a heartbeat. It really helps cabin fever and you can't beat the taste of those tasty crappie.