

Stay on a Hot Bite all Year

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Being a multi-specie-fishing guide, I try and switch species and even lakes to keep on an active bite. My crappie season ends on Lake Shelbyville once the roads get too nasty to tow a boat but that doesn't deter me.

On about the fifteenth of December, the Corp starts dropping the lake from 599.9 down to 594 feet above sea level. This creates a ton of current down below the dam and the muskie will move up to the front of the dam to get the easy pickings of shad being pulled through the dam.

I love to catch the muskie and this is the best time frame to get one for me. We use for the most part one-ounce jigs and six-inch twisters or shad bodies. Just cast them out into the current and reel it back. The fish will either be out in the middle or right by your feet. There are two pipes that let out water and each day one will be turned on slightly more than the other and between them the current is a little more slack and that is where the muskie stage up. This hot bite lasts about four to six weeks or until the current stops.

By then the lake is about to break loose of its icy cover and the crappie will go on a feeding binge looking for that slightly warmer water. We have about a two-week period that the fish will be very shallow in the late afternoon sun. We fish a pegged cork about two-foot deep in water anywhere from thirty-feet to three-foot deep. Yes you heard me thirty feet deep just two-foot deep. That little bit of surface temperature change is what the crappie is looking for. They will suspend right beside standing timber but remain very spooky so a cork and long casts is the answer.

We are in mid February and since I haven't officially started guiding again I like to get in a vacation before the long season set in. My choice is Kentucky Lake down at Paris Landing. My best time frame of getting fish over two-pounds is the last week of February on through the whole month of March. The cold winter has the fish on sharp breaks and river channel breaks in the 18-24 foot range right on bottom for the most part.

We switch over to quarter-ounce Big Head jigs and we hover right over brush and fish one crank off bottom or about a foot. The only time we are higher if it is a stake bed. I can see them topping out higher on my electronics and the square edges that the corners will have. I watch my jig go down the screen and fish it on top of the stakes, usually about six-feet off bottom. My colors are different than at home. I start my day using chartreuse but once the sun gets high in the sky I switch over to a pearl white or emerald blue, which is a very light blue and pearl color. I also use hair jigs in white or chartreuse, big ones designed for smallies. I soak them in scent.

Back at home the same pattern we talked about earlier is going full speed now. This suspending pattern will be the way to fish for the crappie until the water temps get into the mid fifty range.

We can continue to fish for them or April first the hot water section of Clinton Lake opens. The lake gives up a lot of eating sized walleye for the first couple of weeks and tons of big white bass. We fish twisters or sliders or rattletraps or blade baits and cover water and play the wind. Early on though start right at the ditch and spread out from there.

By now we are in mid April and the spawn is starting at Shelbyville. The surface temps are bouncing around between 50 to 55 and this has the males moving up into slightly shallower water. The water is also warm enough for the fish to chase a bait so we take off the cork and cast sliders on sixteenth ounce jigs and bring them by standing trees and over brush about four-feet under the surface. This is a killer pattern for numbers of fish while most anglers are still tight lining and spooking the fish.

May is now here so we get out the live bait and go looking for nests. A jig will work as well but for me the best search tool is a lively minnow. The spawn starts when the water gets about 62 and finishes about 68. Limits are the norm and my regulars know this so they booked them back in December.

May first is also the date that the Corp closes down the dam and let the lake fill up to summer pool. What this means for us, the feeder creeks fill and the fish move up them and will remain up the creeks until the food disappears or about mid June. This is the best crappie fishing that we have all year. Only November crappie can match this bite.

Mid June we switch over to walleye/white bass and let the crappie rest for a few weeks. The fish are on windswept flats and points. We pull jigs and crawlers or cast points with blade baits or small cranks. This pattern will get me by until the fish move deeper and then we switch over to crappie/white bass.

We start out the morning tight lining over down trees along the river channels or just plain old brush piles both in deep water. Fifteen to eighteen feet. Once the boat traffic pushes the white bass off the shallow flats we switch over to the drop-shot rig and buy a ton of minnows. The whites will school up on ledges by the thousands. We get three on at a time and the action rarely slows. This is why most of my clients bring children. School is out and what better treat than to get them hooked on fishing for life. I also break out the slab spoons and go after the huge buffalo. We get fish in the twenty to forty pound range on every trip. These monsters hang out under the whites and put on the best fight of your life. I have had them jump three-feet out of the water and empty a spool of line. These three patterns will remain the same until mid September then we switch back over to crappie.

The fall crappie fishing is just as good as the spring if not better. The weather is more stable so the fish will remain in same patterns. We start out fishing standing timber in deeper coves and by November we move up the lake as far as you can go and fish shallow. This is the best time frame for a real pig. Then about mid November we move back to ledges and river channel breaks and stay right there until ice up. Then we repeat the pattern all over again. Never a break for a die-hard fisherman such as myself. You got to have a passion for it to keep up my pace.