

Summertime Crappie

by Steve Welch

Crappie fishermen are under the wrong influence that crappie are only a springtime shallow water fish that you pursue in April and May. I run a guide service on Lake Shelbyville. One of Illinois finest crappie lakes and I fish exclusively for crappie from late February until early January. I would fish for them year round out of the boat but the ice usually runs me off the lake for six to seven weeks.

In order to put clients on crappie in July first of all you need a lake that is loaded with crappie and this year Shelbyville has been as good as any lake that I fish. I have caught numerous twelve-inch fish this year thus far and even some fourteen-inch fish. The fish are very fat and have good weight. A fourteen-inch fish will weigh about a pound and three-quarter. I have had many days where I have caught fifty fish myself.

A good knowledge of deep structure is a must and since I have been guiding some ten years and fish this lake nearly a hundred days a year. I have a very good knowledge of the lake and its many, many pool levels. A flood control lake has its good and bad points and you must be able to put fish in the boat at winter pool and summer pool. A good deep-water fisherman must be able to bring you back to a precise point out in the middle of the lake time after time. In order to do this I rely on my Garmin GPS. I have over a hundred brush piles and once you get there you must be able to hold the boat over a sunken piece of structure so you and your two clients can put sixteenth ounce jigs down in the structure and not get hung up. If you drift six-foot back and forth everyone is hung up and nobody is catching fish.

The best spots are high clay banks with a steep drop. Just back off into about fifteen-foot of water and look for wood on your depth finder. I fish a sixteenth ounce jig either a Bob Folder tinsel jig or a Southern Pro umbrella jig in my hand tipped with a wax worm. Light line is the key to fishing this deep with such a light jig. I use four-pound test a very limp line with little memory like Stren Magnathin or Sensithin. Then in the rod holder I have a half-ounce sinker above a barrel swivel with a short six-inch leader below it and an ice jig that we make with an oversized hook. On the hook I put a minnow. On the twelve-foot pole I use eight to ten pound test you need heavy line to straighten the hook when you get hung up. I fish a nine-foot pole in my hand and have a twelve-foot pole in the rod holder. That way it doesn't come back and get in the trolling motor or get in the way of my nine-foot pole. You say why do you use a long pole when you are fishing anywhere from fifteen to twenty-five feet deep when a six-foot spinning outfit would suffice. I hold the tip of my nine-foot pole about a foot in front of my trolling motor which has my transducer mounted on the bottom. I have a Garmin 240 on the nose of the boat. I turn on the two times zoom feature since I don't care what is in the top layer of water. This gives me a faster, clearer picture of the bottom where the brush is. I don't care if I can see fish and don't use the fish I.D. feature. They can be misleading. If your brush is big enough and you have caught fish elsewhere in the lake at that depth then you will be fine.

I have found that you can teach a client that has never had a long pole in their hand to vertical jig fish easier in deep water than you can teach them to flip a cork to shallow spawning beds. So it is an easy lesson on my part. Ask my wife Tina she started fishing this way and now I have spent all spring trying to get her to precisely toss a cork to a shallow stump. I taught her to vertical jig fish in deep water in only a few minutes.

So if you think that deep summertime crappie can't be caught and hundred fish days are just tall tails give me a call and let me make a believer out of you.

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