

How to Target Fall Crappie on Lake Shelbyville

by Steve Welch

Finally the fisherman own the lake. I look forward to this time of the year. The trees are turning a grand color of gold and red and the weather is much more predictable than in the spring. Chances are you will have a great fishing trip if not the best trip of your life once you learn how to target those huge fall crappies on Lake Shelbyville.

Fishing any Corp lake means fluctuating water during the spring months and top that with one cold front after another it can be tough to fill the old freezer with those tasty crappies. In the fall patterns become a lot more predictable. It all starts with water temperature. Once we get through the turnover period, which happens about the sixty-one to sixty-four range. The bait will start to migrate up into the far reaches of this huge impoundment into any feeder creek. You also need to know where you are going in these waters because lots of stumps lie hidden just below the surface just waiting to tear up your lower unit. Hence a good time to get a guide. You can quicken your learning curve by leaps and bounds by getting in a good guide's boat just once.

I have been guiding on Lake Shelbyville since 1994 and fishing on it since I was a kid. I know the lay of the land as well as anybody on the water and have nearly two hundred GPS brush piles marked for us to run too and from. Covering water and staying productive is what it takes to get your boats limit. Most anglers can go out and catch a few keepers and a ton of short fish and call themselves successful. But to always get your limit you need to have a ton of shallow brush up in the creeks and the motor on your boat to get to a ton of them. My Ranger 521 has a huge front deck to accommodate three anglers and Mercury 225 on the back to cover a bunch of water. I put in a bunch of pre-fishing time to stay on top of my fish so my clients can enjoy a successful outing.

This time frame from mid October through mid November is some of my favorite fishing. The key word is shallow. A time when you can land the biggest crappie of your life or even a whole stringer of them. I constantly hear that from my clients during this time period. This is also when the big crappie tournaments are held and you had better have your limit of fish over a pound apiece or you won't get a check.

The tackle that we use is a long twelve-foot rod and a fixed cork or a slip bobber and a jig under it. Set no deeper than a couple of foot. The twelve-foot rod helps to dip into the brush and get your bait back out without hanging up. I rig this up a number of ways. A simple number four aberdeen hook and a split shot tipped with a minnow is a great way to catch them. Also a sixteenth ounce jig and a Southern Pro umbrella tube or a Mid South super tube. In some form of chartreuse and either red, black or white or just plain chartreuse.

Once we get close to Thanksgiving we start bouncing back and forth between deeper main lake spots and the shallow creeks. You can still get shallow fish but we have pounded them for a month now and the food is getting scarce in the shallows. It is very easy for me to teach a rookie how to tight line over deeper brush. The key is to have a good trolling motor operator who can hover over brush without drifting around. We use nine to ten foot rods slightly shorter but they are stiffer in order to set the hook in the deep fish.

We still use the same baits that we use under the corks but as the water gets cooler I throw in a couple of more jigs. I like to use the hair jigs made by Slater's and the tensile jigs made by Bob Folder. I keep my crappie nibbles and wax worms handy to tip on the jigs. A little meat can't hurt.

Now is the time where good electronics is a must. I have three Garmins on my boat. A new color 250c on my bow. I really like the detail and will soon have one on my dash to replace the 240. I also have a GPS/ sounder and have over two hundred spots on Lake Shelbyville programmed in to make moving from spot to spot very quick and easy. After all it's all about covering water quickly and efficiently.

I always tell my readers and listeners the best crappie trip you can possibly book is three weeks before and three weeks after Thanksgiving, better than spring. Weather is more stable, boat traffic at a minimum and fishing at a premium.

At the time of this writing I am packing for the Crappie U.S.A. classic over on Lake Patoka in Indiana. A chance to match wits and fish against the top teams in the country for a grand prize of 38,000.