

Wintertime Crappie

BY JOHN ANDREW

Crappie—these tasty fish are caught mostly in the springtime and forgot about most of the rest of the year. I ask why? We actually catch more crappie in the heat of the summer than we ever have in springtime, and if you are in the know, you will catch them all winter long as well.

First and foremost, you need to do some homework. Yes, we need to use the advantages of the internet to help us by checking the DNR websites for the different states, along with the county you are interested in to read, see, learn and find out positive information from Creel Surveys, Shocking Reports, Stocking Reports, type of weed growth, maps and the list goes on and on.

At this time we are now fishing lakes that rarely ever see fishermen, if at all, as well as large creeks and small rivers (the last two are for another article).

We always fish our GPS locations we marked during open water. We then focus on the locations during different times of the day, at different light levels, and different weather conditions, including no wind on sunny days, strong wind on sunny days, snowing conditions and warm spells. Then we gauge other weather factors such as incoming winter snow-producing fronts that produce varying barometer situations, which also dictate activity levels of the fish during daytime and night fishing. Wow, that's more than what most pros focus on!

Let's focus on some methods and techniques on certain lakes that have a high population of crappie. We must learn and achieve this from years of past fishing, word of mouth, or by researching the DNR website reports for those individual lakes.

Now that we've found a prospective lake, let's go drill a hundred holes and hope we catch some fish. Although this may work once in a while if it is a very small location, working the weed flats in the low light conditions is a better option; so is working the deep water adjacent to those weedy areas in a daytime pattern, along with working the main lake basin and any abnormalities (bars, underwater points) that extend out into the main lake basin.

Working the deep brush piles is also a good daytime pattern. We find them suspended above the wood and on certain days, when it's sunny and calm, we find them deep in between the branches or logs of the wood and along the bottom around the main basin areas of the lake. Flats with a soft bottom that are close to a creek channel can also be a good daytime pattern. A hump with weed growth or a bald hump surrounded with a soft bottom can be another good daytime location.



These crappie were caught during the daytime with guide John Andrew over a deep woodpile in 24 feet of water.



Midday crappie fishing with minnows and over the main lake basin in 31 feet of water with guide John Andrew produced these crappie.



Working with guide John Andrew, the deep basin area of this lake produced this big crappie using four-pound-test and a jigging spoon with spikes attached to the small treble hook.

We like using two-pound test with small crappie minnows, either on a small ice jig or a single straight hook with a split-shot 15 inches above the hook. The



On this cloudy day, these crappie were caught in the weeds with tiny ice jigs, spikes for bait and two-pound-test line with guide John Andrew.

distance the split shot is from your hook will vary—trial and error will be needed by the angler. We also do well with wax worms and spikes on ice jigs, especially if no one else has been fishing the same area. The color of the ice jig becomes more and more important as fishing pressure in this location continues.

Even with perch and bluegill, the more pressure your area receives, the more important color becomes. As I have mentioned in other articles, color is important! Ask any professional bass or walleye fisherman if color is important. You better pull up a chair, because they are going to give you an hour-long seminar on how important color is.

When the wind is blowing and it's nice to just sit in the ice house. However, we actually do better if we catch two or three crappie outside the ice house and then drill four to six more holes close by and keep hole jumping between those six holes. This a good daytime pattern that is above a large weed flat or a lake that has patches of very tall weeds that are about 10 to 20 inches in diameter. These weeds may stand eight to 12 feet tall and they support suspended crappie at the sides of these weeds and they also may be mixed in at the top four feet of weeds. The 'gills may be from four to nine or ten feet down and the perch will use these same tall patches of weeds and reside at the bottom of the weeds cruising the soft sediment rutting up larva and tiny worms along with young-of-the-year fry that hide along the bottom of weed growth.

An underwater camera will teach you more than any flasher ever will, as long as the water clarity allows you to see well

for at least a couple of feet. Most fishermen like the simplicity of putting the transducer of a flasher down a couple of feet into the ice hole rather than putting the necessary amount of cord down into the water to see the fish, and then having to wind it back up. For us, we only use the infrared light or white light when we have no choice due to murky or dark water. This is when we switch to a flasher. Using the extra light seems to spook the fish (for us) and you will see this when you turn the light on and off when there are fish present in front of your camera. We prefer the light that penetrates the water naturally.

Remember, there will always be the need for a flasher, especially in dark, murky or stained water. We simply prefer seeing the actual fish and underwater surroundings on the camera, when possible. When using a flasher we always use a tiny slip bobber so the angler can refer to this as a strike indicator. If the bobber moves at all, even the slightest twitch, we set the hook. This works extremely well if you are inside a heated ice house as no line freeze up occurs. Also a spring tip works very well.

I hope this information gets you started for a new look at winter crappie fishing.

Now let's go get 'em! God bless!
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