

Catching Those Suspended Crappie



These crappie were caught on a warm, sunny, summer day with plastics and minnows.



A family outing produced these crappie on a beautiful day with plastic baits while fishing with the author.

BY JOHN ANDREW

Muskie, smallmouth bass, walleye and now the crappie—during the course of a year, all these fish spend a lot of time suspended in the water column on the lakes you are fishing. After today, you too will catch them as we do during the summer and fall.

Many, many lakes have great populations of crappie in them from Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and many other states. Finding summer time suspended crappie is not hard. We simply need to locate the right lake ingredients for the insect hatches that these tasty fish like to feed on during the warm water period of the year. This begins with a large bay or section of the lake that has shallow water and a flat, weedless bottom (mud flat), about seven to 15 feet—the larger the area the better. As the water warms up in this section of the lake, which usually happens quickly in the springtime, the crappie will then spawn along the shoreline and then move to where the food is located, the mud flats.

The mud flats are a great location for all types of insect hatches as mentioned above. This flat is even a better hatchery for the insects if it is connected to a large bay of shallow weeds. Crappie gorge themselves on insects and larvae. The above described location can be a gold mine if your lake has a good sized crappie population. When the water temperature is from 68 to 77 degrees, the hatches are very heavy. If you fillet a couple of fish for dinner, you too will see the larvae in their stomachs.

So why do bright colors work well for

crappie? This will depend on the water color you are fishing. There are times when these large, shallow bays have a darker, or cloudy-colored water due to the wind and algae bloom associated with the higher water temperatures. Also, the large eyes of the crappie help them see a little better than some other species of fish since they tend to feed in the upward direction.

As we approach early fall and the water temperatures begin to slowly cool down, the crappie, as well as several other species of fish, go on a heavy feeding binge. The crappie know that with cooler water, they will see less bug hatches. This is a good time to remember where these suspended fish are located since they will be there year after year. July and August are good times to observe the locations of these suspended fish and if your sonar unit is of high quality, you will actually see the clouds of larva and or aquatic insects on your unit. Yes, this is important; just as it is finding the food for walleye, muskie or suspended smallmouth bass.

Casting for these fish with small spinners, a small jig, small plastics, marabou jigs and everyone's favorite, the crappie minnow is a good selection for your bait. The color of your bait can be extremely important. Ask any walleye or bass pro about color and you better be ready to sit down because they will go on and on about how important color is. This is true for crappie as well. You can catch them on several color patterns but, one color will out-produce all others. You will need to experiment on your favorite crappie lake for the best color. Try using spinners and all the above mentioned lures with various colors and you will soon discover what these sus-



This grandfather was very happy to fish with his grandchildren, as they caught several crappie on a jig and minnow combination.

ended crappie like best.

When catching crappie on certain lures, try the same color on a jig head with a minnow. This could be deadly and normally is. The smaller the size, the better the hook up. However, down in the southern states where 12- to 15-inch crappie are more frequent, larger bait is required.

Drift-trolling or drift-casting when windy conditions are present is also very ineffective. You can anchor your boat, but

you may be limited to where you can cast your light hook due to the wind, so drifting works better during these conditions. Use a drift sock or use your bow and transom trolling motors to slow your drift.

Using your sonar unit is very, very important when searching for these suspended fish. They will easily show up on your screen. A lot of people have been seeing this for years. They simply did not know and/or care what they were seeing

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