

Cool Off With Hot Fall Action

Crappie fishing heats up each fall about the time the water and weather cool down. The trouble is most anglers don't give the season's productivity and opportunity the credit it deserves.

Fish behavior is about to go from a sluggish mode to one of aggression. Fueled by cooler surface temperatures and increased appetites, crappie seem to kick up the bite a notch or two.

Changing conditions such as cold fronts, gale winds and lake levels often deal anglers a tough hand to play in this game of hide-and-seek fishing. Yet fall conditions are predictable, which usually means finding fish in one spot and returning there next week to find them waiting for you with open arms.

During this transition time, crappie typically move from deep, main-lake drop-offs to shallow flats or large bays where meandering creek channels or irregular topography within big creeks hold fish in a zone.

Fall crappie work their way toward midrange depths in a stair-step maneuver, but their destination isn't shoreline habitat or spawning structure areas of backwater bays. This route is often similar to spring spawning migrations.

The movement of the fish is an attempt to stay in contact with their forage base. Schools of shad make a mass exodus toward midrange depths and work up into the shallows later in fall. Zooplankton attracts them, but the shiny parade of morsels jumping in the early morning and late afternoon comes courtesy of tiny insects called midges. When you can see them jumping, it's reasonable to assume that crappie aren't too far away.

It's this magnetism that helps pull crappie from deep main-lake summer hideouts to zones of 5 to 15 feet. Structure such as stumps, brush and other submerged man-made fish attractors give the fish a reason to hang out

there and stay put.

Regardless of what geographic area of the country you fish, establish a route on your fishing trip that puts you in a few different areas between the depths and the shallow shoreline.

Once you've ruled out the extremes of deep and shallow water, you can concentrate your efforts on that in-between section of the lake. Either establish man-made fish attractors in different depths or learn what natural cover is present along the humps, flats and winding creek channels. It's here you'll find fall crappie.

Sometimes the fish may hold on deeper structure, especially on a warm day where clear water teams with high skies and a bright sun. However, in a lake with dingy water on a cloudy, rainy day, the fish probably will be found in shallow structure as they move up to feed.

By considering a few different depth ranges, you'll want to implement a trial-and-error approach. Let the fish tell you where they want to be and don't attempt to make them be where they aren't.

Popular techniques range from vertical presentations of 1/16-ounce or smaller jigs to casting twister-tailed grubs around zones where submerged structure is scattered about. Trolling, drifting or pulling long lines of grubs and in-line spinner-style lures also is effective.

Cast jigs or use slip-bobbers to regulate depth in clear-water situations because the fish are spooky, especially on calm days. Tipping jigs with live minnows has merit, too.

Moving across a zone with the technique of your choice will produce a lot of fish as you cover vast areas. Crappie resume their structure-oriented reputation during mid to late fall, so pay close attention to your LCR and utilize float-in buoy markers to pinpoint spots.

I often work shallow spots in early morning and late afternoon, backing off to slightly deeper structure near deep water as the sun climbs at midday.



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As always, crappie like the best of both worlds, so structure near creek channels or humps is worthy of consideration. Deep and shallow water close together often spells success.

Sometimes I'll return to an area in the afternoon that might have been void of success in the morning. If it's an area I have confidence in, I'll give it a second chance because I frequently find that fish have moved up and occupied the spot during the day.

I enjoy fall crappie fishing because I prefer to fight fish and not crowds. This is a season that's on the side of anglers, delivering good fishing conditions for extended periods, which makes staying in touch with the fish less challenging than at other times of the year.

So slip out to your favorite lake this fall while all those spring-only anglers are at the ballgame or hunting deep in the woods. You'll likely discover good fishing times await you. 🎣

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