



Take Full Advantage Of The Winter Season

Some anglers have spring fever smack dab in the middle of a cold winter. The colder the wind, the more we yearn for dogwoods in bloom and warm sun with light winds. Yet winter can (and should) be a valuable season to crappie anglers all across the country.

Over the years, much of my spring, summer and fall success can be attributed to what I did during the winter months in preparation for the upcoming seasons.

I enjoy winter fishing despite being at the mercy of Mother Nature and her elements. It's true that anglers have to pick their days and sometimes bow to gale winds and cold fronts. Yet those days when light winds are present allow you to stalk main-lake ledges where hefty slabs sleep deep in the stumps and brush.

Light strikes from large crappie are the norm at this time. I love the finesse fishing required to fool these illusive fish.

Some crappie anglers across the nation often migrate to summer venues where warm breezes signal an early start to spring fishing. Stalking the aquatic wonderlands of Florida, Louisiana, Texas and some deep, clear reservoirs of the Southwest gives a few anglers a head start.

Yet only a small portion of anglers has the time and resources to head south and dodge the forces of nature. But you can still make progress and lay the groundwork for great fishing days ahead, even if you stay put on your home lakes and ride out the winter there.

In addition to a few fishing days during winter, you can scout out your

favorite waters when lakes are low. Most Corps of Engineer reservoirs experience winter drawdown, which is a change in lake levels to create more storage capacity for run-off. While flood control, navigation and hydro-power are top priorities, anglers can use the changing lake stages to search for hidden treasures, namely submerged stump beds, logs, rockpiles, feeder creeks, etc.

Winter drawdown is also prime time to place manmade fish attractors in your local lakes. The low-water periods expose potential hotspots for both spring spawning zones and the fall hangouts.

Purchasing topographical maps of your favorite lake or learning to read state-of-the-art sonar equipment is vital to any crappie angler, but logging some time on the water and observing are part of a common sense approach to what often turns into a complex situation.

I look for sandbars or humps where deep water is close by. Crappie like the best of both worlds, so erecting structures or finding natural cover already in place that may be located next to a creek, ditch or slough will be worth the effort.

Jot down landmarks in a notebook or log the location into a GPS unit. Rising waters will soon hide the spot, but rest assured, the fish know how to find it and so should you.

Although there is no bad time to place fish attractors in lakes, winter is perhaps the best time, as structures placed out now will pay dividends when spring arrives.

How soon will fish occupy your manmade fish attractors? I've sunk many crappie beds in February that




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paid dividends in late March and early April, thanks to warming surface temperatures.

Once surface temperatures climb to the mid to upper 50s, fish are on the move toward potential spawning grounds. However, algae and plankton also enter the equation, forming on wood or plastic material. This helps attract shad and other baitfish, and the crappie aren't far behind.

Farmers plant in spring and harvest during fall. Fish farmers, namely crappie anglers, do it a little differently, as they plant structures in winter in hopes of harvesting coolers full of fish during spring, summer, fall and again next winter.

So plan ahead and use a little elbow grease now in anticipation of good fishing days ahead. 

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