

## Best Baits & Equipment For Migrating Crappie

**T**he spawn provides one to three weeks of fast action when the fish go to the bank. Fortunately, fishing season lasts longer than just the spawning period, which is also called crappie season. One of the best times for crappie fishing is the two to four weeks before the spawn.



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continue to rise, crappie will move to the top of primary channel ledges. From there, they travel along the ledge until they reach a creek channel or the mouth of a big cove.

They then turn toward shallower water and continue their migration.

Their last stop is at a staging area located just out from the spawning site. Here, they wait for perfect water temperatures to complete their annual ritual.

### Finding Prespawn Sites

There are three ways to find migrating fish. The first is to go where you think the crappie will be located. Regular fishing trips will keep you

in tune to what they are doing and where they will likely be. Experience is another important factor for finding fish based upon the season and water temperature.

A second method is to start in deep water and work your way toward shallow water. This is a good, logical system when the water is still cold. Simply test-fish different spots and move shallower until you find the crappie.

A third method is to start shallow. Obviously, this is a good method when the spawn is near. Start at a known spawning bank and work your way toward the middle depths. You will likely find crappie in staging areas or along shallow to mid-depth ledges.

### Techniques

Crappie may hit incredibly hard during the prespawn, but the best bait presentations are difficult to predict. Typically, the cold water calls for very slow bait movements. You must try different presentations and baits when the fish are picky.

Slow-trolling should be your first option. The slow-troll method in the South means fishing with four, five or six poles. In the North, you are usually limited to two. Rod holders allow for multiple poles and baits. While hand-holding two long poles puts fewer baits in the water, it gives you the advantage of feeling light bites and setting the hook quickly.

Why is slow-trolling so effective? Along with more baits at different depths, the slow, controlled troll combines an excellent search tactic with a near-perfect catch technique.

For example, say you are fishing the top of a ledge that is 10 feet deep. Your movement keeps you going past spots with no cover or fish. However, as soon as you get a bite or see cover on the locator, you can stop the boat and probe every inch of the place. Therefore, slow-trolling is a great open-water technique for prespawn fish.

### Equipment/Baits

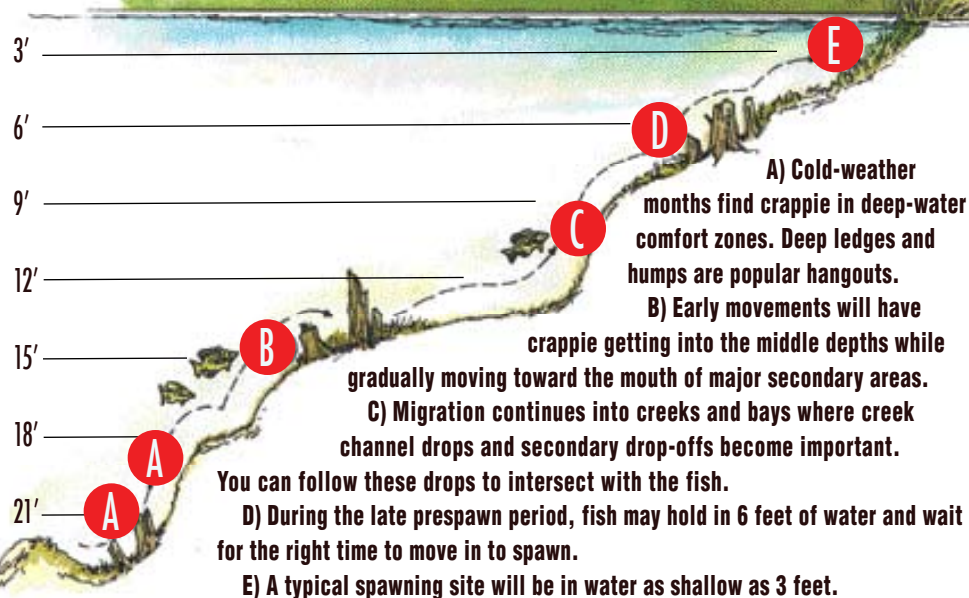
Multiple-pole trolling requires a rack with rod holders. The holders keep the rods in the boat even if the bait hangs up or has a big fish. Poles should be 11 to 14

### Movements

Warm southern winds of late winter mixed with longer daylight hours signal warmer water. Crappie migrations begin bringing fish from their deep winter homes toward shallow water.

When water temperatures

## Prespawn Hotspots



feet long when fishing most waters. Ultra-clear water may require 16- to 20-foot poles to avoid spooking the fish.

Hand-held poles should be 8 to 10 feet long because longer poles will cause more fatigue. Lightweight poles are important and so is sensitivity.

You can purchase double-hook rigs or tie your own. A ½- to 1-ounce sinker keeps baits down. You can use minnows or jigs. If you prefer jigs, start with ⅛-ounce sizes as a good general weight for moving slowly. Increasing to a ¼-ounce weight or using a split shot can help keep your line vertical.

Don't overlook having the best bait possible. Minnows should be kept fresh and lively. Jigs should hang correctly in the water. All hooks should be sharp. Never fish without a good scent because it can only help your fishing. At times, it can triple or quadruple your bites.

## Casting

Prespawn is a time when you may find fish in holding areas. Casting is a good method for these fish. They may be shallow enough that you can use float-and-fly tactics. A jig under a float allows you to be versatile in where you fish and the bait speed you use.


Deeper fish require a free-fall jig. You can count the jig down after it hits the water to control your depth. A slow, steady retrieve should keep your jig at approximately the same depth for most of the retrieve.

A slip-float and minnow offers another way to put a bait at any depth you want. A minnow floated across cover is a deadly, proven tactic.

## Factors


**Temperature** — Water

## Double-Hook Minnow Rig

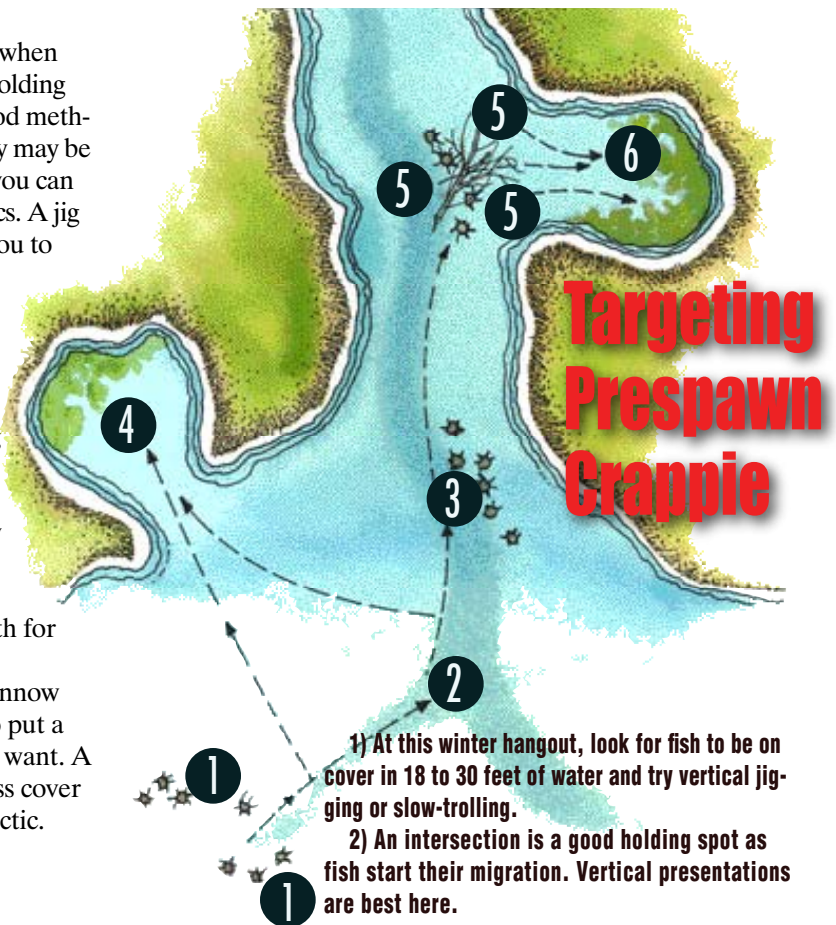


With a double-hook minnow rig, a heavy sinker keeps the line vertical. Hook separation is determined by the depth and strike zone. The typical separation is 18 inches. Be sure to use sharp, thin-wire hooks.

## Vertical Slow-Trolling Jig



For a vertical slow-trolling jig, use a ⅛-ounce jighead when you want to move very slow but a ¼-ounce jighead and/or a ¼-ounce split shot when you want to move faster. Remember, less movement may be better. Scent can be added with a Berkley Crappie Nibble.



1) At this winter hangout, look for fish to be on cover in 18 to 30 feet of water and try vertical jigging or slow-trolling.

2) An intersection is a good holding spot as fish start their migration. Vertical presentations are best here.

3) Mid-depth stumps along a creek channel are a top pick as a prespawn holding spot. Vertical techniques or casting a free-fall jig to concentrations of crappie will work well in this spot.

4) A shallow northern cove can heat up quickly with sunshine and warm southern breezes. A jig-and-float with a spinning outfit provides an excellent way to search for and catch crappie.

5) Staging areas can be creek channels, secondary drops and/or cover. Fish will hold here until conditions are perfect for spawning. Slow-troll, fast-troll or cast to specific cover in these spots.

6) At the spawning site, try casting or vertical jigging with jigs or minnows in areas with cover and brush.

temperature is a key to early crappie movement. Northern locations warm first.

**Wind** — Spring winds can be a problem for boat control. When crappie move shallow, they don't like banks pounded by the wind. Try to pick protected areas but only if they hold concentrations of fish.

**Fishing Pressure** — Wakes, noise, rude fishermen and crowded conditions are typical problems as the weather warms. It can make getting on good areas difficult because the

spots may be taken or you simply don't want to show them to other anglers.

**Sun** — Light penetration can be a major factor. For example, spawning depth is directly related to light penetration. That's why a stained lake may have spawners at 1 foot, but a clear lake will have them at 12 feet. Therefore, prespawn migration depths will be based upon their general location at a specific time and the light penetration. Fish may be at 8 feet at dawn and 14 feet by noon. ⚙️