

Taking a look at some winter crappie

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
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With the Upstate Boat Show in Greenville this weekend, many crappie anglers can't wait till warmer weather to get on the lake and catch some crappie.

But why wait?

Wintertime often provides some of the most consistent crappie action of the year, and the chances of having an entire cove or even most of the lake to yourself are pretty high. To that end, here are a few crappie-catching tips that can be put to use right now, when the water and air temps are still low and before the lakes get crowded.

USE GOOD ELECTRONICS

Today's modern electronics take all of the guesswork out of crappie fishing. No matter what time of year or where the crappie go, a good sonar unit will help you locate them.

Seasoned anglers spend more time riding than fishing in the winter. There are so many variables that you can't

assume the fish are all going to be shallow, deep or holding on brush piles. The best course of action is to get out and first look for baitfish and then start looking for crappie.

SLOW DOWN

Crappie slow way down when the water gets cold, so to catch them, you need to slow down your presentation. A good example of how to elicit bites is to imagine if someone were to stick their finger in your face and hold it there. Pretty soon you're going to slap it out of the way.

That's the way a crappie feels with a jig right in front of him. Even if he's not hungry, he's going to eat it out of irritation.

Some presentations — namely single-pole jigging or tight-line trolling and side pulling — allow the angler to sit right over the fish to get that bite.

Another trick is once a fish is on the hook, don't be so quick to get that fish in the boat. Oftentimes, a fish fighting on the line will excite the rest of the school and make them a little more active.



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Crappie anglers dreaming of spring weather don't need to wait to start catching crappie this year.

USE LIVE BAIT

Using fresh, live bait is the only fool-proof method

for consistently catching crappie year round, but especially during the

winter when crappie are not as aggressive.

Using live bait precludes the crappie angler from being concerned with what colors of artificial baits to use. It also presents the fish with the same food it is accustomed to eating.

If you were to look back on all the fish the better-than-average crappie angler catches in a lifetime, it's a safe bet that most caught at least some crappie by using live bait. Very few minnow-only anglers ever go home empty handed.

Even when using crappie jigs, tipping the jig with a live minnow will add scent, taste and visual attraction to the bait, causing the fish to hang on longer and give the angler time to set the hook.

to be 10 degrees warmer. A 2- or 3-degree difference in water temperature is a big deal to a crappie.

The best places to look for warming water trends are freshwater inflows where water has run from a shallow muddy creek, or anywhere rocks or cement will warm in the sun and transfer that heat to the water.

USE LIGHTER LINE

Finally, lighter line often helps winter crappie anglers feel the bite of soft biting crappie when they have to use more finesse to get fish in the boat.

LOOK FOR WARMER WATER

One thing most successful winter crappie anglers do is to always make it a habit to search for warmer water, which will attract both baitfish and crappie to a particular area. It doesn't have

The majority of crappie anglers use 6- to 10-pound test when crappie fishing, but dropping down to no more than 6-pound test and even 4-pound test when crappie fishing in the winter will increase the chances of getting bites from lethargic crappie.

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