

IT'S THE CRAPPIE TIME OF YEAR by Nick Carter Angler Magazine April 2013

For many Southeastern anglers, Spring means it's time to break out the lightweight tackle and load the boat with Crappie. Across the region, Crappies are moving into the shallows to spawn, and then they'll begin moving back out. Over the next few months they should be easy to catch. The timing varies depending on the lake, but according to Dan Saknini, president of the Lanier Crappie Anglers Club on Lake Lanier, Ga., the movements are predictable. The first rule is these structure-oriented and light-sensitive fish will always be in some type of structure, whether it be brush piles, blow downs or docks. They move progressively shallower to spawn in just a few feet of water as surface temps warm into the mid 50s and warmer. Then they'll reverse the process, moving deeper as the water continues warming into the summer months. A small minnow fished under a cork or with just a little weight is a sure fire way to catch a mess of Crappie, and many fish are caught trolling wide spreads of small jigs. However, Dan likes to jig, either deep under many docks on Lanier or on brush on the banks or open water. He is a conservationist and urges anglers to keep only as many fish as they are going to eat. That said, here are some tips he shared to help fill a cooler with some of these tasty fish.

THE GEAR: Dan goes with a 1/24-oz. Jiffy Jig, which can be hard to find, and he always uses a color with chartreuse in it. His favorite colors are: JJ20, black head, bubble gum body, chartreuse tail; and JJ41, red, white, chartreuse. He fishes 4-pound Mr. Crappie high visibility line on a 5-foot, 6-inch B'n'M Sharpshooter rod. He likes a Shimano Sienna spinning reel, either the 500 or 1,000 models.

SHOOTING DOCKS: With big eyes on the tops of their heads, Crappie are always looking up, and they don't like the sun. So the deepest, darkest spots under a dock will hold fish. To shoot a jig, line your boat up parallel with and 4 or 5 feet away from the dock. Let your jig hang to the lowest guide on your rod, pinch the jig by the bend in the hook, pull it back even with the reel to load the rod and let the jig fly, releasing the line with your reel hand as the jig slings way up under the dock. It takes a little practice, and you'll likely lose a few jigs in the process, but it helps if you bend over low and keep your rod parallel with the water.

SLACK LINE: Most of your hits will come on the fall. Let your jig fall vertically with a little slack, maybe wiggle the rod tip a little, and watch that neon-green, high visibility line. If the line moves or if the jig stops falling, set the hook and haul in your fish. If you don't get bit on the initial fall, retrieve the jig slowly, imparting a little action from the rod tip.

CHOOSE A DOCK: Floating docks and docks on pilings are both good, but boathouses and covered docks are the best because they provide the best shade. Pontoon boats are always great targets because you can shoot into the darkness between the pontoons, but there are a couple keys no matter what kind of dock you're shooting. The first key is the presence of bait fish. Watch your electronics, bait fish around a dock is a good sign, and if there's added structure such as sunken brush it's even better. The second key is depth. Crappie change depth with the water temperatures and the seasons. Find the range of depths they are holding at, and fish docks with that much water under them.

ALGAE ATTRACTORS: Pretty much anything in the water will have some algae sticking to it. Algae attract bait fish. Bait fish attracts Crappie. Get your jig around boat lifts, boat lift air hoses or anything else under a dock that has some good green scum on it.

BOAT HOOK: With even a little wind, staying in position to shoot docks is difficult, especially since your trolling motor only provides thrust from the front. Give the guy in the back of the boat a boat hook on a telescoping pole. Position the bow with the trolling motor, preferably one that is foot or remote operated, and use the boat hook to push the stern off of docks if you need to.

NEVER USE A SPLIT SHOT: This is for the live bait guys. Whether you're

pitching minnows under a cork or dropping them vertically to brush, there is no reason to use split shot sinkers. How many times have you caught fish on a split shot asked Dan. He suggested tying a jig into your line 18 inches above your hook instead of using a sinker. The jig will get your bait down just like a sinker will, and it's also likely to catch fish. SCENT: It can't hurt to add a little fishy smell to your jigs. Berkley Crappie Nibblers, JJ's Majic Dippin' Dye or any of the other commercial scent attractants on the market will make your jigs a little more palatable to the fish. On that subject, you could also just tip your Crappie jig with a minnow. BRUSH PILES: It can be tough enough to find and stay on top of sunken brush, whether it's in 4 or 40 feet of water. Use your electronics to find sunken structure and then mark it on a GPS. That way you'll be able to find it again. When you're ready to fish it, locate the brush and mark it with a buoy. Back off 30 feet or so and fish the brush thoroughly from all angles. Dan said he does donuts around his brush piles, and often the bites come from only one side. Be sure to pick up your buoy when you leave. You wouldn't want someone else to find your good hole that easily. NETWORK: If you aren't on the water all the time, the easiest way to keep up with what the fish are doing is to be in touch with people who are. Make friends on the water, visit the local tackle shop frequently or join a fishing club. That way you'll know what stage of the spawn they're in, how deep they are, what they're biting before you go out. These are just a few of the pointers Dan gave during a day on the water with THE ANGLER MAGAZINE. And judging from the catch that day - too many to count - he knows what he's talking about. A deep fried mess of Crappie fillets with all the fixings is a meal fit for a king, so get out there and catch a few. Just remember to keep only the fish you need. Check out the Lanier Crappie Anglers Club at www.laniercrappieanglers.net.