

# Water Temperature and Crappie

Contributed by Bruce Spangler and Chuck Good

Another article by

Team Crappie.com

Tournament Anglers  
Bruce Spangler and Chuck Good

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Most experienced anglers consider water temperature to be the single most important factor governing the occurrence and behavior of crappie and their locations. They sometimes behave in what seems an irrational or unpredictable way. Once the angler understands how water temperature influences crappie behavior, they can pinpoint crappie throughout the year.

Using some kind of water temperature gauge or a simple pool thermometer will help get you onto fish much quicker. Most depth finders today also have a water surface temperature reading capabilities. When a temperature reading is given on a gauge or a fishing report (DNR, Game & Fish, newspaper, etc.), it is referring to the temperature at or near the water surface. With those temps listed, you can figure on the deeper water being a few degrees cooler. Also the temperatures of the creeks and protected bays could be higher or lower by several degrees, depending on inflowing water in creeks, water clarity and sunshine/cloud cover.

## LOCATION GUIDELINES

Crappie generally start their movement out of their deep water winter haunts when the water temperatures start warming towards the 45-50 degree range. They will congregate around the entrances of creek channels until the water temps reaches around the 50-55 degree range. Then you can expect them to begin migrating towards the shallower secondary creeks and bays, using the channels as "highways". At this point, try trolling minnows or casting a CULPRIT Tassel Tail or Curl Tail grub to isolated stumps, brush and small pockets, and retrieving them back very slowly. When water reaches in the 55-60 degree range, the males should be in shallow water looking and fanning out spawning beds, while the females stage out in the closest deeper water structures. Crappie feed more aggressively and baitfish are more active as spawning nears. Try dropping a minnow under a cork into the spawning beds for males. Use a cast and slow retrieve with a CULPRIT Paddle Tail grub for the deeper females.

As a general rule, surface temperatures in the 62-65 degree range are almost perfect for shallow, spawning crappie. The females will then move in and around brushy cover. Your best bet now is to drop live minnows under a cork. Any bad weather or cold fronts can set the whole process back a few days to a few weeks. This will be explained in more detail later.

When water warms to the 70-75 degree range, the females will leave their nest and move to nearby deep structures where they staged before the spawning. The males stay behind to guard the nests. Use a cast/retrieve slowly with the CULPRIT Paddle tail grub. By the time water reaches 75 degrees, the males will be joining the females and migrate through the channels the same way they came in back out to the deep cooler water for the summer.

When the water starts to cool in the fall, they will again move back into the creek channels to feed heavily for the upcoming winter months. Most crappies will stage halfway up the tributaries near to the pre-spawn locations. Casting the CULPRIT Crappie Baits such as the Tassel Tail, Paddle Tail and Curl Tail jigs is an effective and fun way to catch crappies now. When water temps fall in the mid-40's range, they will migrate back to deep water in the main lake.

Keep in mind that these water temperature ranges are arbitrary, depending on the locations of the water you fish. For example, crappies spawn when water is in the 62-65 degree range, which can be as early as January in the Deep South or as late as June in the North.

## COLD FRONTS AND FALLING WATER TEMPERATURES

There's another factor that seem to be even more important than just a specific temperature. Let's say you found great fishing for a couple days at the 65 degree mark. Then a relatively mild front comes in and drops the surface temperature down to 62 degrees. Even though the water temperature is still in the "ideal" range, you may find that fishing is off considerably. Fish are not completely without the ability to regulate their body temperature. They have the instinctive ability to behaviorally thermo regulate. This means they seek out areas of preferred temperature in an environment that is not at uniform temperature.

Especially in the Spring, crappie are super-sensitive to temperature variation. A sudden drop when the temperature is in the 50's is more dramatic to fish behavior than a similar drop from the 60's.

You may have to alter your tactics and try deeper water or heavier cover to counter the effects of the sinking

temperatures. Also, concentrate on those northern shorelines or coves protected from northerly cold fronts and exposed to the longest period of southerly sunlight.

Keeping a close watch on water temperatures can make a weighty difference in your stringers of crappies throughout the year.