

Catch More Fish: Crappie dock patterns

by RJ_Abernathy

You know the local lake that you spend all your time fishing? The one with all those houses that line the shore - the houses with all the boat docks? Those docks might be clogged with people loading and unloading boats and having all kinds of fun, but some of the best crappie fishing can be found directly below them at almost any time of year. So what is it about these docks? It doesn't matter what part of the country you're fishing, if you've got crappie in the water, they're bound to be around these docks. Granted, crappie love certain docks more than others (wooden docks seem to hold more crappie than metal ones), but once you figure out which docks they prefer and what kinds of baits and tackle work best around this structure, there will be nothing stopping you from stocking the livewell with big slabs of crappie. The allure of docks as they relate to crappie is that these structures provide the necessities that these tasty fish need to survive. Pilings that support docks provide food and cover along a wide range of depths. Grass shrimps, crustaceans and minnows feed on the small plankton, then crappie feed on them. The older docks have algae growing on them, which attracts baitfish, and that attracts the crappie.

Most importantly, docks are best when it's sunny and hot. Clouds tend to make the cover less important and causes fish to scatter. The bright sun penetration pushes crappie into the most shaded area under the docks, and it's not unusual for crappie to be on one side of the dock in the morning, and then on the other side later in the day. The wooden docks just a foot or so above the water is ideal. The posts and cross-members also provide shade and protection for crappie.

Deeper water, at least nearby, is another key ingredient. Shallow docks may produce during certain seasons, but deep-water structures will hold crappie year round. Other than the spawning season, the water depth beneath or at the end of a dock should be at least 6 feet to attract crappie. Docks and piers in shallower water can be productive providing there is nearby deeper creek channels, which are travel corridors that crappie use to migrate in and out of creek arms as the seasons change. Also, around most docks there will be sunken trees, brush, stakes and other man-made structures that have been placed in the water. Many dock owners do this to establish a holding area for crappie and also to hold a larger concentration of fish.

Because crappie are so found in so many places around the country, it seems that people in different places have different ideas on what constitutes crappie tackle. For some, it's simply down-sized bass gear. But when you target crappie specifically, choose an ultra-light spinning reel and rod, like a like an Abu Garcia Cardinal 100 on a five-foot Berkley Lightning Rod. Most people prefer 4- to 8-pound test monofilament such as Trilene XL, but let things like water clarity and the structure you are fishing around determine how heavy a line to use. The last thing you want is to lose a big crappie because it broke the line as it rubbed against the dock.

Many people target crappie using live bait - namely minnows. There's ways to catch more crappie using artificial baits, and it lessens the amount of time you spend re-rigging baits and running back and forth to the bait shop. A Johnson Beetle Spin has been catching crappie for decades and it's very easy to fish - just cast and retrieve. Others like to pack PowerBait Crappie Nibbles into a Berkley Scent Vent. This in-line component spins on the line above the bait or hook and releases the scent and taste of the Crappie Nibbles as you retrieve it. Some of the best crappie fishing can come on flipping a 1-inch Berkley Micro Power Tube packed with the Crappie Nibbles. All of these baits are powerfully effective ways to get those tasty crappies on your line. Simply cast them on the shady sides of the docks and dock supports until you get a strike. Once you've located one crappie, you can be relatively certain that there are more. Crappie fishing is a great way to spend time fishing with the family and to introduce non-anglers to fishing. By targeting crappie around docks and employing these simple techniques, you can be rewarded with a great fishing experience and a fine meal.

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