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Advanced Crappie Jigging Tactics

written by [Don Wirth](#)

Some of the top crappie guides in the nation share their secret jigging methods!

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The lead head jig is unquestionably the deadliest artificial lure ever created for crappie. Extreme versatility is the key to its success. You can fish jigs 12 months of the year in an astounding number of crappie situations by varying jig style, weight, color and presentation. And, you can pack a zillion [jigs](#) in your tackle bag and still have plenty of room for a baloney sandwich!

Serious crappie anglers are always looking for new wrinkles in jig fishing. Here, some of the top crappie guides in the nation share their secret jigging methods - tactics you can use to score more and bigger crappie on your next outing.



Extreme versatility is the reason the jig is such a successful crappie bait.

#1: Tom Moody's Cold Front Approach

Tom Moody, like other veteran Kentucky Lake crappie guides, uses the so-called "Kentucky rig" for probing this sprawling reservoir's ledges, drop-offs and submerged brushpiles. Tom uses a standard double wire crappie rig with a 3/4-ounce bell sinker on the bottom. Moody normally uses the rig with two hooks baited with shiner minnows, but during cold fronts, he replaces one or both hooks with a Charlie Brewer [Slider Grub](#) on a 1/16-ounce jighead.

You'd think live bait would outperform any artificial lure during a severe cold front, but you'd be wrong, Moody insists. "The Slider Grub can be fished just as slowly and methodically as live shiners, but it gives you the added versatility of using color to your advantage," he says. "By mixing and matching grub and jighead colors, you can achieve exactly the right presentation to trigger bites from non-aggressive fish."

Crappie are more color-sensitive than most other freshwater gamefish, including bass, Moody emphasizes. "Often merely changing jig colors provokes an immediate aggressive feeding response. That's why it pays to keep plenty of Slider Grub, tube bait or twister [grub](#) color options in your tacklebox, and to experiment with different jighead/lure color combinations. These lures are inexpensive; you can equip a couple of plastic utility boxes with a complete color palette for fewer than twenty bucks. Be sure to stock up on different colored jigheads while you're at it -- sometimes just changing from a white to a chartreuse head will turn the fish on."

Cold-front crappie often bury deep inside brushpiles and stake beds; this presents no problem for Moody's modified Kentucky rig. "Simply position the boat directly over the cover, lower the sinker to the bottom, reel your line up slowly, then lower it back into the cover," he instructs. "Determine whether the crappie are striking the top or bottom hook/jig, then adjust your presentation accordingly. For example, if most of your hits are coming on the jig, replace the live bait hook with another Slider Grub. When fishing two jigs, if your hits are coming mostly on the top lure, raise the level of your presentation a foot or so; often this results in two crappies striking the rig at once."

Tom's Bonus Tip: "When rigging a soft plastic bait on a jighead, always position the knot on the hook eye so the lure hangs at a 90-degree angle from the rod tip. This gives the jig the natural look of a live minnow swimming horizontally through the water."

#2: Garry Mason's Suspending Crappie Technique

There's no question that a jig's single hook and compact lead head make it a good choice for probing dense bottom cover. But this lure is also an effective tool for catching crappie suspending in the water column - especially once you master Kentucky Lake guide Garry Mason's unusual presentation tactic that is.

"The problem most anglers have with jigging suspending crappie is keeping the jig within the depth zone the fish are using," Mason points out. "Many fishermen have experienced the frustration of catching a fat crappie from a suspending school, only to be unable to score

repeat strikes because they couldn't put their jig back in front of the fish."

Mason's technique revolves around the spinning reels he uses on his crappie rods. "Say I just hooked a crappie 18 feet deep off the side of a creek channel," he explains. "I know I want to get my jig back in that same spot as quickly as possible, and the surest way to do that is to not touch the reel handle while bringing in the fish. So instead of reeling, the instant I feel the fish hit, I squeeze the line closest to my right hand tightly against the rod handle, then I reach down and pull the line above the handle far enough to get the fish up within reach of the landing net. Then I unhook the fish and drop my jig back into the exact same depth zone. This will seem awkward at first, but with practice, it becomes easy, and it's the surest way to jig up a boatload of suspended crappie that I know of."

Garry's bonus tip: "When fishing a jig vertically, it's critical to have your line as vertical as possible, not at an extreme angle from the boat. If the wind is blowing hard enough to offset your line angle, go to a heavier jighead, or pinch one or two split shot about 3 inches above your lure."

#3: Todd Miller's Upside-Down Rigging Strategy

Most jig fishermen rig their soft plastic lures the traditional way: hook up/tail down on both twister grubs and shad-tail baits like the Slider Grub. Priest Lake, Tenn. crappie guide and tournament angler Todd Miller agrees that's one way to do it, but he'll give the fish a change-up when the bite gets slow. "On a highly-pressured lake like Priest, I try to give my jigs a different look from what the fish are used to seeing," he explains. "One way to do that is by rigging twister and Slider Grubs with their tails facing up instead of down. This not only creates a different visual profile in the water, but it gives the jig a more erratic action, like a wounded minnow. Note that the hook now lies directly in front of the lure's tail, displacing water. This helps contribute to the bait's jerky swimming action and can mean significantly more bites."



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A tube bait's cylindrical design means there's no tail hanging down or pointing up, but the lure's soft plastic skirt requires the angler's attention to achieve the best action, Miller adds. "Often the skirt strands are stuck together in the molding process, so before you fish a tube, always take a moment to gently pull the strands apart," he suggests. "If the strands are too molded together to pull apart without ripping up the lure, carefully cut the strands apart with a hobby knife. Separating the skirt gives the lure a more fluid, lifelike action, and it'll fan out better when it's falling"

Todd's bonus tip: "Crappie are incredibly finicky about lure color, so I like my jig head and grub or tube body colors to be different so I can cover as many bases with a single presentation as possible. A flash of red or chartreuse on the head often turns on sluggish fish."

#4: Jim Duckworth's Jig Trolling Method

I've learned to count on Tennessee multi-species guide Jim Duckworth to come through with creative fish-catching methods, and this one is ideal for you crappie anglers who get easily bored when sitting on a hole and waiting for the fish to bite. "I've had excellent results over the years trolling crankbaits for white bass, walleye and sauger, and I discovered along the way that crappie would often respond to a trolling presentation as well, especially from post-spawn through summer," Jim noted. "In order to make my trolling presentation more crappie-specific, I came up with a rig that incorporates both a crankbait and a jig."

Duckworth ties on a Bandit 200 crankbait, then adds a 1/16-ounce Slider Grub to the trailing hook via a leader line. "This rig is awesome when crappie are suspending in open water over a channel dropoff or hump, or relating loosely to deep submerged brushpiles," he explained. "The crankbait works like a depth planer to get the jig down to the level of the fish and then keeps it at a constant level. I'll locate a school of crappie or a big wad of bait on my graph, and then I'll circle back around and slow-troll through it with my gas outboard or trolling motor."

On days when crappie are actively feeding, it's not unusual to hang fish on both lures at the same time, Jim says. "But the jig part of the rig really shines when the bite is slow," he adds. "The Slider Grub is a compact, non-threatening offering that even sluggish crappie can't turn down."

Jim's bonus tip: "Even when crappie won't hit the crankbait, it serves as an attractor, getting their attention until the jig swims by. For maximum visibility, change crankbait colors to match water conditions. In murky water, use a bright color such as chartreuse, or hot orange. But in clear water, go for realism and flash with a shad or chrome pattern. Replace the stock front treble hook on your crankbait with a red hook for even more attraction."

#5: Harold Morgan's Float 'N Fly Method

The so-called float 'n fly is a plastic bobber and small hair jig combination that has taken winter smallmouth bass fishermen by storm. This innocent-looking rig is incredibly deadly on bass suspending in cold, clear water, and although the jigs used with the method are miniscule, it's racked up impressive catches of trophy smallmouths in many cold-weather bass tournaments.

Although the float 'n fly has received plenty of national press as a hot new bass technique, it's really a time-tested crappie method, one that famed Nashville guide Harold Morgan has used for decades. "This is the ultimate jigging method for suspending crappie," Harold promised. "Virtually all other jig presentations involve some movement of the lure, either sideways or up and down in the water column. Not this one. The bobber floats the jig in place indefinitely, which is exactly the presentation you want when the water is gin-clear and

super-cold."

Morgan turns to the float 'n fly when the water temperature dips below 50 degrees in winter, noting, "It really comes into its own in 40- to 45-degree water, when crappie typically refuse to bite even live bait."

Harold uses a long, light-action spinning outfit spooled with 6 pound mono -- 4 if the water is extra-clear. He ties a 1/16-ounce hair jig to the end of his line, trims the hair back with scissors so it's about even with the bend of the hook, snaps a small plastic bobber on the line and positions it from 8 to 12 feet above the jig.

Morgan fishes the float rig on banks with a rapid slope into deep water, such as a channel bluff. He casts the bobber close to the structure, waits several seconds for the jig to sink, then either lets the bobber sit still, or gently shakes his rod tip to make the bobber (and the jig) quiver in place. If nothing happens after a minute or so, he reels in a couple of feet of line and dangles the jig some more. It usually doesn't take long for the crappie to react. "The tiny jig looks just like a fry minnow, and crappie will attack it without hesitation. It'll also catch bass, trout and walleye. This rig proves that in jig fishing, sometimes less action is more desirable.

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