



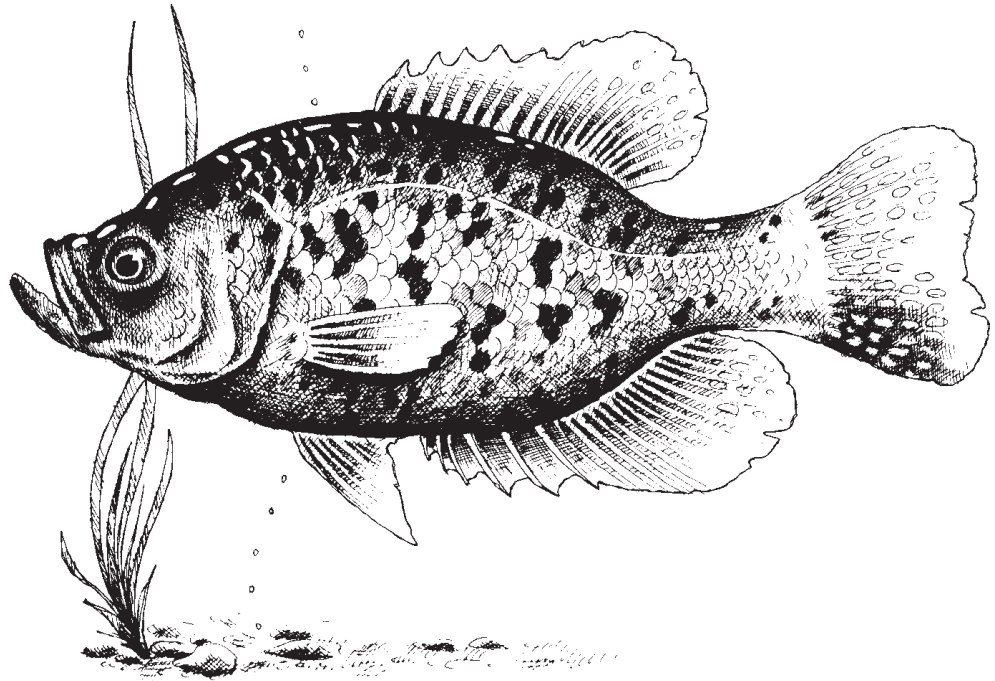
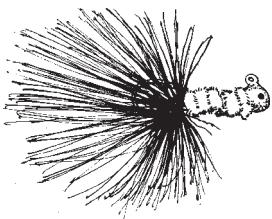
Crappie & Crappie Fishing

Crappie are among the most popular sport fishes in Texas. They are known by various names including white perch, sac-a-lait, calico bass, and paper-mouth.

Two species are found in Texas, the white crappie (*Pomoxis annularis*) and black crappie (*P. nigromaculatus*). Black crappie have irregular dark speckles and blotches on their sides. On white crappie, the dark markings consist of regularly arranged vertical bars. When in doubt, count the number of sharp dorsal spines at the front of a crappie's dorsal fin. Black crappie have seven or eight spines while white crappie have five or six. During the spawning season, males of both species develop dark markings over most of the body, causing many anglers to misidentify male white crappie as black crappie.

Black crappie are more numerous in the clear, acidic to slightly alkaline waters of East Texas. White crappie are found statewide. Fish of both species may live up to eight years and become sexually mature at one to two years. Crappie belong to the same family as the sunfishes and black basses; like their cousins, crappie are nest builders. Spawning takes place from mid-March to mid-May, beginning when water temperatures reach 60°F and peaking between 68° and 72°F. Crappie spawn in one to six feet of water, usually in the backs of protected coves, shallow island areas, under overhanging banks, on or near flooded brush and timber, or near submerged vegetation. They usually nest in colonies and females may spawn more than once. After the eggs hatch, fry spread

out rapidly and move to deep water within a few days. Bass and crappie prey on each other. If many yearling bass are present, predation can prevent the establishment of a strong year class of crappie.



Young crappie feed on microscopic crustaceans called zooplankton. Juveniles and adults feed primarily on small threadfin and gizzard shad and insect larvae, especially mayflies. Their diet also includes minnows, silversides, other crappie and any other fish small enough to swallow.

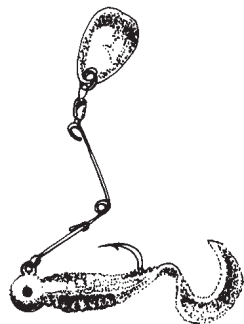
In lakes with low bass populations, crappie often overpopulate and become stunted. For crappie to reach larger sizes, populations must experience high total mortality to keep their numbers within the carrying capacity of their habitat. Crappie populations typically exhibit high rates of mortality due to natural causes, but only moderate levels of mortality due to angler harvest. These factors allow for generous harvest regulations in most areas.

Texas has a statewide minimum length limit of 10 inches and daily bag limit of 25 crappie. Bag limits are higher on some reservoirs that border neighboring states. Others have special seasonal regulations that prohibit culling the catch. In these lakes, crappie tend to spend the winter months in deep water. These fish, when caught, are unlikely to survive release at the surface level because of the rapid decrease in water pressure and its effect on the fish's swim bladder. The seasonal regulations are designed to prevent high post-release mortality.

Crappie populations are cyclic or erratic in abundance and size distribution. When a strong year class develops in a lake, it can dominate the population for several years. Reproduction is limited and survival of young crappie is low until the dominant year class has been thinned out or environmental and hydrological conditions again become favorable for survival of young crappie. This pattern usually results in two to three years of good fishing followed by two to three years of fair to poor fishing. The dominant year class may survive longer with more stringent regulations.

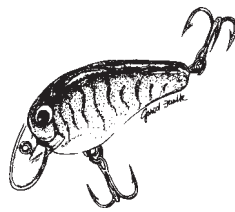
Fishing Methods

Crappie can be caught with most kinds of fishing tackle from cane poles to ultralight spinning tackle to fly rods. The best live bait for crappie is a medium-size minnow. Best artificial lures include various types of jigs and small spinners ranging from 1/32 to 1/8 ounce. Crappie will take almost any color or combination of colors available on the market. Marabou, hair and plastic jigs all produce good results. Bigger crappie are often taken on crank baits, larger spinners and plastic worms.



Crappie can be caught year round, but the best time is during the spring spawning season when the fish are in shallow water and relatively easy to locate. Crappie often congregate in groups; if one is caught, more are usually present. From mid-February to mid-June, they are generally found in less than 15 feet of water in coves, along submerged

creek channels, near submerged islands or in other areas of good cover. This includes willow trees, cypress trees, flooded timber, submerged vegetation, stumps, boat docks, piers, boat houses or anything else that provides shelter. Fish your bait close to the structure and fish it slowly. If no fish are caught in 10 to 15 minutes, move to another structure or try another bait type. Once crappie are located, similar areas in the same vicinity should produce more fish. A graph recorder is excellent for locating fish around submerged structures such as creek channels or vegetation.



As the water warms in the summer, crappie move out to deeper water and congregate just above the thermocline, where the water temperature starts to decline rapidly. During this time, night fishing is highly productive. Hang a light over the water near the mouth of a cove, near a creek channel, in flooded timber or around islands or points in 15 to 25 feet of water. Fish near the bottom with live minnows or small jigs. Raising the bait slowly through the water can help locate fish.



In the fall, crappie move back to shallower water, but not usually less than 10 feet deep. During the winter, they often gather in schools suspended 20 to 30 feet deep or deeper over structure, such as a ridge or river channel. These fish are hard to locate and will often bite only at certain times. Some excellent winter fishing is available around lighted and baited fishing piers.

Eating Crappie

Crappie are delicious and can be cooked a wide variety of ways. Larger crappie should be filleted while small crappie can be either filleted or gutted and scaled. Score the sides of the scaled fish with a sharp knife before cooking. Roll the fillets or whole fish in corn meal and fry them in hot oil for several minutes. For a lighter meal, try baking crappie fillets on an aluminum-foil-covered cookie sheet. Lightly spread margarine on each fillet and season with lemon pepper or your favorite seasoning mixtures. Bake until the fillet margins turn a golden brown and the interior meat of the fillet flakes apart with a fork. Fried, baked, or sautéed, crappie are some of the best eating fish that swim.

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