

STOCKING YOUR POND WITH FISH

GENERAL INFORMATION ON POND STOCKING

Sure, you want to get a fishable population established as quickly as possible but don't make a big mistake by incorrect stocking. Allowing "friends" to put fish in your pond without regard to size or species can lead to population imbalances and management problems down the road. And....it's a short road!

Give some thought to what species of fish you like to catch and eat and what you want your pond to look like and be used for in the future. Stock it only with fingerlings (1 to 3 inch fish) obtained from reputable hatcheries and always stock in the proper numbers for good balance.

SPECIES:

Largemouth (or black) bass are predators. They are highly prized sportfish and can provide wonderful fishing and great eating. Bass reproduce when they are about 10 inches (approximately ½ pound) and spawn only once a year. This occurs in the spring when the water temperature reaches around 68° F. While bass can grow in a pond by themselves, they do much better if they are stocked with forage fish upon which they can feed.

Striped bass hybrids make an excellent sport fish and provide excellent eating. Hybrids are formed by crossing members of the genus *Morone*, which includes striped bass, white bass, white perch, and yellow bass. Depending upon the cross they may be referred to as Palmetto bass, Sunshine bass, Maryland bass, Virginia bass, or other popular names. The fish are not sterile but should not reproduce in static ponds. They can be fed with pelletized feeds or stocked with forage fish. If you have a bluegill problem in your pond, you may consider stocking larger hybrids (8 inches and larger) to control them.

Bluegill are an easy fish to get established in a pond. They provide fun fishing, striking readily at a variety of artificial lures and baits and will eat plankton, larvae, and insects, as well as formulated feeds. Large bluegills will also feed heavily upon smaller fish. A good management program involves removing bluegills from ponds when they are caught. They are highly reproductive and their numbers constantly need to be controlled by fishing and predator fish. Bluegills reproduce from June through August and do not do well by themselves in a pond. Fingerlings are stocked at a 10 to 1 ration with predator fish.

Channel catfish are a tasty warm water fish that have become heavily produced by commercial fish farmers. Hence, they can be intensively cultured by themselves or can be stocked with largemouth bass, bluegills, or hybrid striped bass. Channel catfish become sexually mature at about three years of age but survival of the fry in the presence of bass and bluegills is unlikely and they frequently need to be restocked. They can be added at any time without upsetting the balance of existing populations. You should not confuse or stock other types of catfish such as bullheads or yellow catfish since they will not do well in your pond.

Other species may be stocked such as **Golden shiners** and **Fathead minnows**. These are forage species that reproduce heavily and can provide feed for your predator species. They are summer spawners and can be stocked to start populations in new ponds. Golden shiners will reach 8 to 9 inches in length while Fathead minnows will not exceed 3 inches. Golden shiner stocking is done at about 400 per acre and Fathead minnows at 10 pounds per acre. Some experts advise against stocking these fish in ponds with a lot of shallow areas since these species may stay in the shallows, building up in population while being unavailable for the predators to feed upon, and possibly overpopulating the pond and competing with bluegills for food.

Some people have tried to stock trout in ponds on the Eastern Shore but with poor overall success. Trout are a cold water species and the summer water temperatures in the area generally result in high to complete mortality in the warmer month. The only cases where they might survive is in conjunction with a large flow of spring water with high turnover and oxygenation. If you are considering stocking trout, you need to spend some time investigating the pond over the course of a year for a probability of success.

STOCKING STRATEGIES:

1. 100 Bass
1000 Bluegills
note: this is a "standard" stocking program for an intensively managed pond. Without intensive management, stocking should be reduced by one half.
2. 100 Bass
800 Bluegills
100 Channel catfish
note: provides additional diversity of species for intensively managed pond.
3. 150 Channel catfish
note: if allowed to feed naturally
4. 2,000 Channel catfish
note: a high density stocking if fish are going to be fed formulated (pelletized) feeds
5. 1,000 Hybrid striped bass
note: if going to be fed formulated (pelletized) feeds
6. 100 Hybrid striped bass
1000 Bluegills
note: variation on predator/forage stocking for intensively managed pond.
7. 100 Bass
400 Golden shiners
100 Channel catfish
note: another variation on predator/forage stocking. Caution should be used in stocking shiners in ponds with large amount of shallow area.
8. 400 Golden shiner
note: stocked alone for insect (and possible algae) control. Caution should be used in stocking shiners in ponds with large amount of shallow area.
9. 500 Hybrid striped bass
10 pounds Fathead minnows
note: for recreational hybrid production. Caution should be used in stocking minnows in ponds with large amount of shallow areas.

STOCKING YOUR FISH:

If stocked at the same time, Bass and Bluegills should be introduced from July through September. Bass fingerlings should be about 1 to 3 inches long at that time. Bluegills can also be stocked later in the season, after the bass populations become established. Bluegills should NEVER be put in a pond by themselves early in the summer or they will reproduce during the same season and overpopulate the pond! Catfish fingerlings are available during this time also and striped bass hybrids are available from June. When stocking fish, you should ensure that you are obtaining them from a reputable hatchery and that you have the correct ratios for the stocking strategy that you have adopted for your pond. If you go wrong at this point, the only reasonable recourse you have is to drain the pond, remove the population, and restock. You should never add adult bluegills and bass or allow others to do it to your pond. Good intentions can cause serious problems in you pond management program. The end result is that you will have poor fishing in future years because the populations will be out of balance.

When you begin fishing your pond, you should remove bluegills from the population in the same ratio that they were stocked. That is, in a standard bass/bluegill population you should remove 10 bluegills to every bass. They should be removed and discarded whether you eat them or not. While this may seem wasteful, it will result in better fishing and healthier fish populations throughout the years.

OTHER INFORMATION:

Information on liming and fertilizing ponds to encourage production is available in "Liming Farm Ponds" and, "Fertilizing Farm Ponds", available from Maryland Cooperative Extension Service offices.