

female may deposit eggs in batches over a several-week period. The long spawning season assures that there will be offspring even if adverse conditions occur during some parts of it.

The bluegill does have some desirable qualities: It is easily caught, is a good scrapper on light tackle, and is tasty. It's ideal where you want fast action for kids.

Hybrid Sunfish

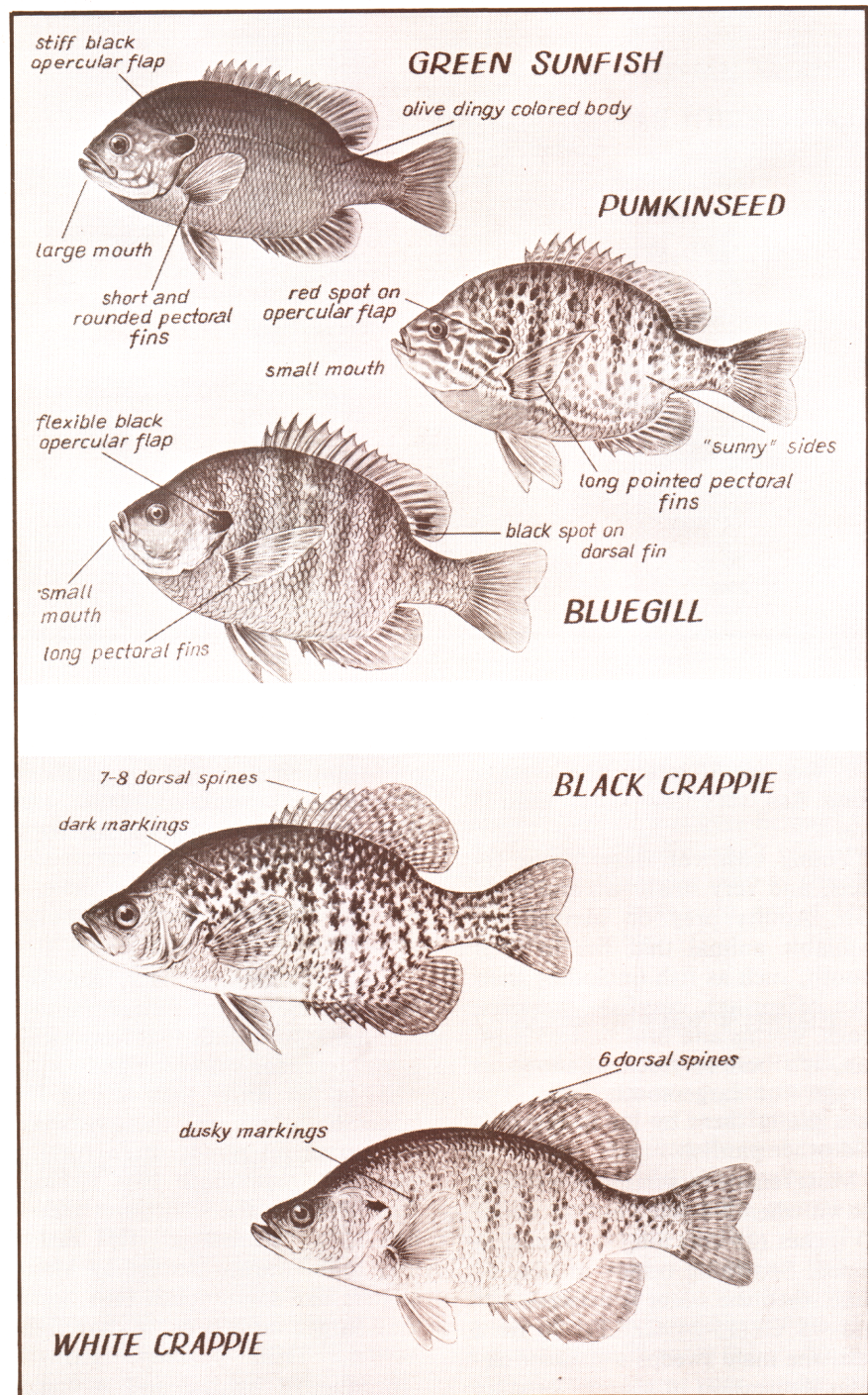
Bluegill-pumpkinseed hybrids and other crosses between sunfish species are infertile and therefore are desired by some pond owners as substitutes for bluegills (and any of the other sunfishes) which overpopulate. However, hybrids are often unavailable from dealers, they tend to be expensive, and commercial stocks of hybrids often are contaminated with fertile sunfish. The result is breeding, eventual overpopulation, and stunting. The prospective buyer should weigh the potential harm of this risk against purported benefits. The only benefit may be a forestalling of overpopulation by a year or two.

Channel Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*)

Catfish stocking in Michigan ponds has increased, owing to their greater availability since extensive southern catfish farming developed in the 1960's. But the catfish has certain drawbacks in ponds of northern states. They do not generally spawn successfully in ponds unless special spawning structures are installed. Also, their growth in Michigan is slow compared to growth in the South. The catfish is a truly warmwater fish which grows fastest in water over 80°F (27°C). In fact, catfish farming is possible only in southern states or where the water exceeds 70°F (21°C) for at least 4 months each year.

Nevertheless, catfish gradually grow large enough to provide recreational fishing in many southern Michigan ponds. They normally reach 12 inches (30 cm) after 3-4 years.

Catfish eat many types of food, both living and dead: insect larvae, crayfish, snails, worms, clams, fish



Panfishes — these generally are unsatisfactory in Michigan ponds.

and various items which fall into the pond.

Females usually mature at 13-16 inches (32-40 cm) in length. They spawn in a cavity such as beneath undercut banks or in hollow logs when water reaches 75°F (24°C). The male guards the eggs and fry until they school and leave the cavity.

Forage Fishes

Small fishes, such as minnows and shiners, can be stocked in ponds to provide forage for bass and catfish, although it will not always be necessary to do so. **NEVER STOCK FORAGE FISH FOR TROUT.** Trout don't need them, and the small fishes will compete for the food that the trout do eat.