

Managing Warmwater Ponds For Fishing

Determining If a Pond Is Suitable for Warmwater Fish

For warmwater fish, much of the pond should be warmer than 70°F (21°C) for most of the summer. If cooler, it may be better for trout (Chapter 8).

Measure water temperature on a hot summer afternoon a foot below surface near pond center. If over 70°F, it's probably suited for warmwater fish. This is just a rough guide. Warmwater fish grow best at 75°F (24°C) or more.

In case of borderline temperatures, there are three alternatives to consider:

- Try trout. Often they do well in a borderline pond for several years until dissolved oxygen content of the water falls too low (under about 5 parts per million) due to accumulation of organic matter.
- Try smallmouth bass (with or without minnows). They prefer somewhat cooler water than do largemouth bass and other warmwater fishes.
- Try largemouth bass.

Try trout only before any other kind of fish is stocked. This will avoid competition from residual bass or minnows. In borderline cases you can economize by using only a token stocking of a dozen or so fish per acre, then follow their progress by catch-and-release fishing. If they survive and grow well the first year, stock more.

For warmwater fish, summer dissolved oxygen can be as low as about 3-4 parts per million, but should be higher than 5 ppm most

of the time. Oxygen will be more plentiful in summer and winter if water depth is at least 15 feet (5 meters) and plant nutrients low to moderate, so excessive build-up of organic matter doesn't occur.

For more information, see Chapter 4, "Ponds as Places for Fish to Live."

Stocking

While stocking is far from being the only important aspect of managing for good fishing, the kind of fish used, their body size, amount stocked, and time of stocking will do much to determine fishing quality, especially in the first 3-5 years after a pond is built or renovated. Special details on stocking of various kinds and combinations of fish are given below. For other information on each kind of fish see Chapter 5. Chapter 9 deals with fish population control.

Largemouth bass, bluegills and other panfish usually won't need restocking, since they reproduce well in most ponds. Adding to established populations of these fishes generally results in loss of the newly-stocked fish—or to competition and poor growth of survivors. Smallmouth bass may have to be restocked, and channel catfish usually will.

Bass (largemouth or smallmouth) without other fish. In ponds lacking other fishes which compete for food, bass often thrive on worms, insect larvae and crayfish. We strongly recommend trying bass alone. If growth is unsatisfactory, forage fish can always be added. Smallmouth will work better than largemouth bass where the water is

