

Aquatic Plants And Their Control

Aquatic plants play essential roles in the recreational fish pond. The healthy pond will have moderate amounts of a variety of plants. Plants become overabundant and interfere with pond use when—and only when—nutrients are too abundant. We then view the plants as weeds to be controlled.

Control of the overenrichment-overvegetation problem is one of the most common pond management needs. The way to prevent a pond from becoming algae-ridden or weed-choked is to keep excessive amounts of nutrients from getting into the water. The only permanent way to restore a pond from plant overabundance is to halt the oversupply of nutrients. Trying to control plants by cutting or with chemicals is only temporary. Overzealous use of chemicals (herbicides and algicides) to poison plants may damage the health of the pond community and should be avoided.

Plants not only release oxygen and serve as the producer base of the pond's food web, they also furnish cover in which fish like to rest, and they support organisms that fish eat. Having a few well-spaced plant beds can provide prime fishing spots. Certain vegetation also attracts waterfowl and other enjoyable wildlife.

The disadvantages of too many pond plants can include:

- Unfavorable build-up of organic matter on the bed.
- Daytime overproduction of oxygen to an extent toxic for fish.
- Nighttime overconsumption of oxygen to a point where fish do not get enough.
- Daily changes in acidity/alka-

linity balance of the water which are unfavorable to fish and other organisms.

- Too much cover for small fish to hide from predator fish, resulting in overpopulation of the pond with small fish.
- Interference with fishing, boating and other activities—including seining to control fish populations.

If less than a fourth of the pond surface is covered by plants, there is probably no problem unless this interferes seriously with use of the pond. Even much more vegetation than that may pose no threat to the welfare of pond fish.

Kinds of Plants

The many kinds of pond plants are in two general groups: **algae** and **rooted leafy plants**. The latter have flowers.

Algae (the plural of alga) are single-cell plants or colonies of cells lacking true roots, leaves or flowers. There are three types of algae:

— **Planktonic algae** drift free in the water, are usually microscopic in size, and, when abundant, make the water look murky. Algal murk may range in color from green to yellow and brown or even gray.

— **Filamentous algae** are thread-like or netlike. They may be small and free-drifting but often occur as “mossy” growth on rocks, plants and other firm objects. Some kinds form a water surface scum or a slimy, felt-like mat on the pond bed. Most scums and mats are actually communities containing many bacteria and fungi, as well as algae.

— **Chara algae**, also called muskgrass or stonewort, grow attached to

