



## Stocking Recreational Fish Ponds



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Fishing is a wonderful warm-weather pastime many of us enjoy. At the extension office, we often receive calls in the spring and fall from landowners on how to properly stock recreational ponds with fish.

Pond owners can call farm supply stores during the spring and fall to find out when their live fish trucks may arrive. Fish are typically transported during cool weather to reduce handling stress. The fish are typically small and can be hauled short distances in large, water filled containers.

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources no longer stocks recreational ponds, but the department recommends the following fish species to establish a balanced fish population that will provide good pond fishing in about two years' time. Bluegill (not hybrid bluegill) and largemouth bass form a predator-prey relationship where the prolific spawning of bluegill provide enough food to support a largemouth bass population. Largemouth bass consume some of the bluegill and control their overpopulation. Two years after you stock a pond, you should have largemouth bass at least a foot long and bluegill at least 6 inches in length. You can catch these fish provided they are stocked and harvested in the proper numbers.

You can stock redear sunfish and channel catfish as supplemental species if desired. Fish stocking rates are listed below:

Stock 400 fingerling bluegill (1 to 2 inches long) per acre in the fall\*

Stock 120 largemouth bass per acre in the spring.

50 channel catfish fingerlings may be stocked per acre in the fall if desired.

\*40% of the bluegill (160 fingerlings) may be substituted with redear sunfish (shell crackers) if desired. Redear sunfish only spawn once a year and will not provide an adequate food source for bass if stocked without bluegill.

It's more difficult to maintain a balanced fish population in smaller ponds. You can be better off stocking ponds less than a half-acre in size with 50 -100 channel catfish fingerlings and fathead minnows for forage fish or feed them a commercial catfish feed instead.

It is important to stock only bluegill, largemouth bass, redear sunfish and channel catfish in ponds. You should not stock fish species such as crappie, hybrid sunfish, gizzard shad, golden shiners, bullhead catfish and yellow perch, as they may overpopulate small ponds. Ponds containing undesirable species often need to be drained or the entire fish population chemically eliminated and later restocked.



Restocking ponds that contain existing fish populations is challenging since fish fingerlings are typically small and easily consumed by larger fish. Buying large replacement fish may be expensive. Transferring fish from other ponds or lakes is not recommended, because it may introduce disease problems.

In time, many ponds may become overcrowded with small, stunted largemouth bass. Removing some of these small fish may correct the problem. However, these ponds may provide fewer but larger bluegill.

Ponds with overpopulated bluegill will produce many 2- to 3-inch long fish and often a few large largemouth bass that are hard to catch. You can add more largemouth bass to the pond to try to obtain a balanced population.

To maintain a proper balance among fish populations, a rule of thumb is to harvest 4 or 5 pounds of bluegill for every pound of largemouth bass removed.



More information on aquaculture topics is available at the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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