

## What Sizes to Stock

New or reclaimed ponds are normally stocked with small (1- to 4-inch) fish, called fingerlings. These small fish will produce harvestable populations in one to two years. Care must be taken to make sure that wild fish are not present in the pond, or the newly stocked small fish may be eaten.

To shorten the time before a pond becomes fishable, larger fish can be stocked. These will be more expensive to stock, but the amount of time required before fish can be harvested from the pond can be reduced.

## How Many to Stock

It is critical that the correct number of each species of fish is stocked. Improper stocking rates may prevent a pond from producing a quality fishery. In Florida, 100 bass and 500 bluegill fingerlings are normally stocked per acre. Catfish can be stocked at 100 per acre, along with the bass and bluegill or by themselves in catfish-only ponds. If the catfish are to be fed, then higher stocking rates of catfish can be used. If larger fish are stocked, fewer fish are required. Stocking rates of fifty 8- to 12-inch bass, two hundred 4- to 5-inch bluegill, and fifty to one hundred 8- to 12-inch catfish should be used.

## When and How to Stock

To prevent wild fish from becoming established and competing with stocked fish, a pond should be stocked as soon after it is filled or reclaimed as possible. Bluegill and catfish are normally stocked in the fall, and bass are stocked the following spring.



Stocking bluegill in the fall will allow them to spawn, providing the small bass with a forage base. Catfish are stocked in the fall to allow them to grow large enough so that the bass will not be able to eat them. Bass are stocked in the spring because they are highly cannibalistic, and if left in the hatchery ponds in large numbers throughout the summer, they would eat each other, thereby reducing the number of fingerlings that would be available for stocking. Contact your regional Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission office or your County Extension Service office for a list of local fish suppliers.

Stocking a pond in mid-summer should be avoided. High water temperatures and low dissolved oxygen may weaken fish being transported. Sudden temperature changes can cause fish to go into shock and die. When stocking fish, transport water and pond water temperatures should be equalized by slowly adding pond water into the transport container. The fish can then be added to the pond when the water temperature in the container is about the same as that of the pond.

## Fish Management

### Fishing the Pond

When it comes to managing a pond for fishing, a distinction must be made between fishing and harvesting. Fishing is simply the act of trying to catch or catching fish, while harvesting is removing the fish from a pond. Generally, no limit needs to be placed upon the fishing of a pond, but fish harvest must be closely controlled. Occasionally, a fish that is returned to the pond may die from hook injuries or mishandling. These fish must be considered as part of the harvest. If properly handled, few fish will die while being caught and released.

Overharvesting off bass probably ruins fishing in more Florida ponds than any other cause. Anglers can easily overharvest the bass population during the first season of fishing. This allows the bream (bluegill and redear sunfish) to overpopulate the pond. The likelihood of bass overharvest can be reduced if the pond owner restricts the harvest of bass by anglers. However, making a pond off limits to everyone is not encouraged because underharvesting can also lead to problems.

The most sensible way to prevent bass overharvest is to establish a 15-inch length limit for a period of two to three years following stocking. If during this time, all bass that are less than 15 inches in length are released, the pond should begin producing harvestable-sized fish of all species. During this time, the fish that were originally stocked will have to