

Do-It-Yourself Hawg Pond

Want to turn your pond into the lunker heaven you've always dreamed of? Here are a few techniques, from the simple to the technical, to help get you started.

By Greg Grimes

Another good topwater hit! Man, I couldn't believe it!

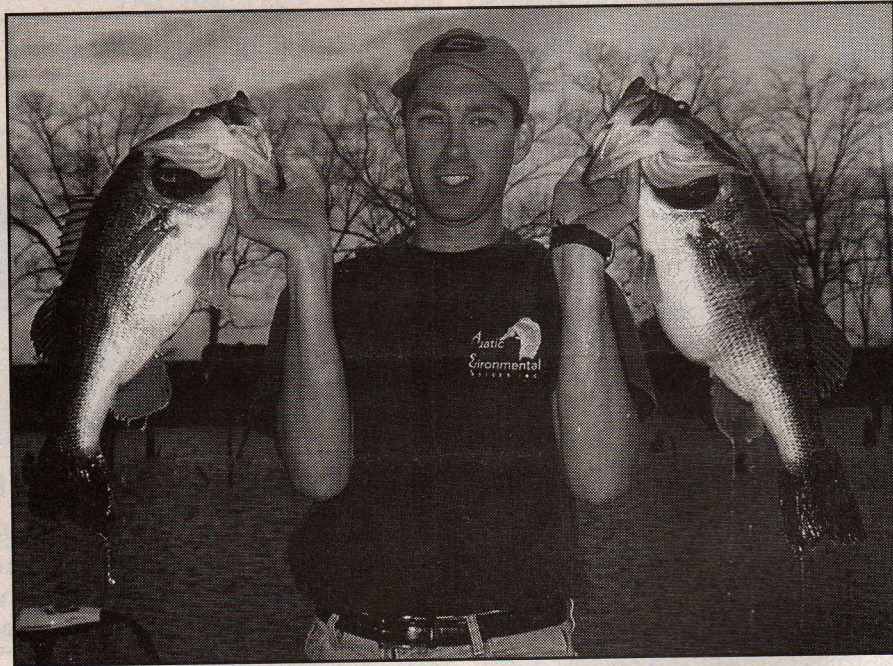
The rain was starting to come down as the front moved in when she exploded on the Pop-R. I made sure to wait to feel the hit before setting the hook, and this one fought even harder than the other two 5-pounders I had just landed. As she came up, jumping completely out of the water, I saw just how big she really was. When I finally got her to the shore I quickly put the scales on her: 6-lbs. 11-ozs., the biggest bass of the morning.

This occurred last spring on a pond that for more than 20 years only occasionally produced a trophy bass. However, three years beforehand we started a trophy-bass-management program. I can hardly wait to see what it can produce in a few more years.

You may have read my article "Pond Management 101" in the June '99 issue of GON. Several readers called me with questions, and almost all of them wanted more specific information about managing for trophy bass. So, here you go. If you want a truly great bass pond then this article should get you started in the right direction.

Most hunters know you need three things to produce big whitetails: age, nutrition, and genetics. Largemouths are not much different. One of the good things about bass, though, is that you can continue to catch the same fish as you watch it grow. However, releasing all the bass back into the pond is not what's needed every time.

Bubba Mauldin, a fisheries biologist with DNR, explained this concept to me a few years ago. He said look at your situation like there is a "bass pie" made of bluegill. If you have 100 bass eating from that pie there is not much to go around, but if you limit the pie to 50 bass they all get a bigger slice and start to grow faster. This is the power of harvesting fish, especially when a pond is overcrowded. The next thing you can do is increase the size of the pie with proper fertilization and supplemental feeding, and add some more



Even though he has electrofishing equipment, fisheries biologist Greg Grimes used rod-and-reel to "sample" these trophy lunkers in a private, south Georgia pond. In this article, Greg responds to questions about trophy bass management.

ingredients in the form of threadfin shad. More on that later.

The final key is genetics. Georgia bass have a good mix of genes, easily pushing the scales over 10 pounds in the proper environment. You may be able to get your hands on a bass that can genetically become a new world record, but stock him in a majority of the stunted bass ponds in Georgia and he may never even reach three pounds.

Before you commit to a trophy bass program, you should ask yourself if this is really what you want to do. Can you handle the negative aspect that the bream fishing will not be as good as in the past, or that in a small pond of less than five acres the numbers of bass in the pond will be limited? If so, the first step to starting your program is determining the current balance of your pond. Do you typically catch 10- to 12-inch bass, with only an occasional lunker? If so, you need to form a selective-harvest plan.

Selective harvest is an important aspect of trophy-bass management in spite of what some fishermen you see on television may say. Basically, if

you're catching bass that are nice and fat then throw 'em back. However, if the fish are skinny and all the same size then the "bass pie" is being fed on by too many fish. Removing these stunted bass frees up food for others.

Should you keep the trophy 9-pounder your wife caught? It's her biggest ever, and guess what, she wants to hang it over the mantle. Even when your goal is for 12-lb. lunkers, I would let her keep it, but throw back most other 9-pounders. These large bass are not the most important fish for reproduction, so occasionally taking one out will do little harm to the pond.

One of the best ways to increase your catch of trophy bass is the addition of structure. Many ponds in Georgia are devoid of structure with a bottom that resembles a bathtub. Structure doesn't create more fish, but it definitely concentrates them so the educated fisherman knows where the big boys are hanging out. Get creative, add cover that will provide shade and ambush points. Remember to place the cover in several depth ranges. Rocks, trees and tires can all help liven up a

