

Successful Pond Stocking

Fall is the time of year to begin stocking your pond for a successful future — whether you want big bream, big bass or other fish.

By Greg Grimes

As a pond-management consultant, I get numerous calls from pond owners who have received misguided, confusing advice on fish stocking. If you're interested in how to properly stock a pond to achieve your fishing goals, then read on.

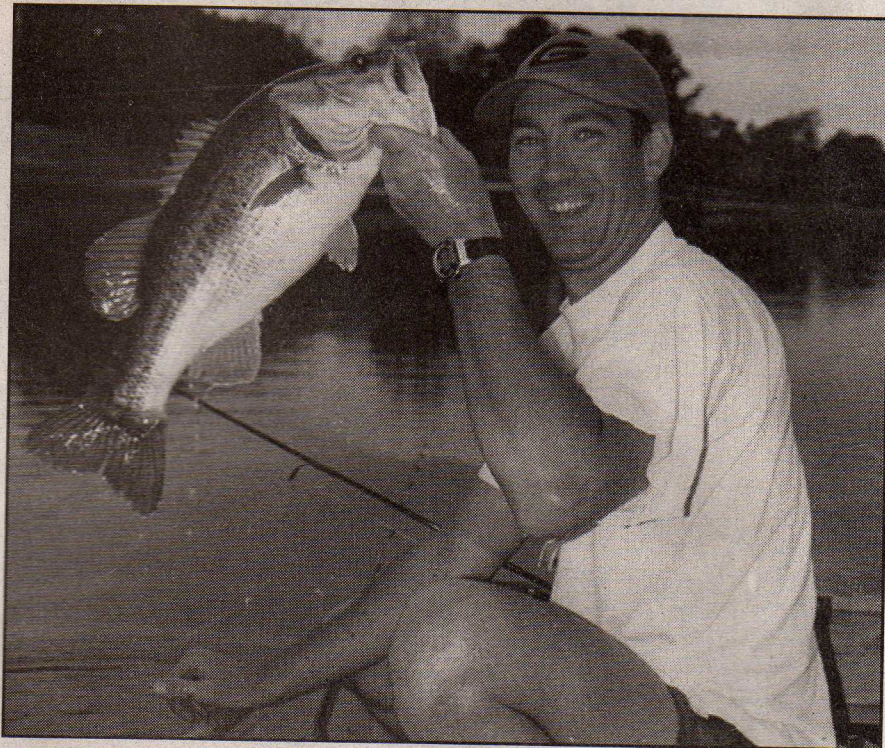
First, decide the goals for your pond. Do you want trophy bass, quality bream, or a good balance of both? Just remember to have realistic goals. You cannot manage for trophy bream and trophy bass in the same pond, however, you can have decent fishing for both.

After setting your fishing goals, you are ready to get started. Whether the pond is new or drained you must ensure that it is devoid of all fish before stocking. You may have to hire a licensed applicator to apply rotenone to kill any potentially problematic fish. When all the fish are gone and the lake is full, you are ready to begin your stocking program.

For a balanced pond I suggest you go by the DNR Fisheries recommendations. These recommendations will lead to catches of good, pan-frying sized bluegill and shellcracker, several good bass and the occasional wallhanger. DNR suggests 500 bream per acre, with 80 percent being bluegill and 20 percent shellcracker. This mix allows good bass forage since bluegill spawn many times during the summer months. The shellcracker or redear don't reproduce as much, but may get larger than the bluegill since they feed on a slightly different food niche. The 80/20 mix should be stocked in the fall or as late as March before stocking the largemouth bass at a rate of 50 bass per acre in May.

You can obtain free fish if you fill out an application from your local DNR Fisheries office before October. You may also contact them for a list of private fish dealers. In addition, the Farmers Market Bulletin is a good source for fish dealers around the state.

For a quality-bream pond, stock the same numbers above. However, do not make a special effort to keep a lot of bass. You will end up with a "bass heavy" pond typical of many found in Georgia. This allows for more smaller, fun-to-catch bass. These bass will cause a



Having a trophy-bass pond is the result of the right recipe of stocked species, managed for the results you want. Fall is the time to begin your stocking efforts.

reduction in the total number of surviving bluegill, but the remaining bream get big and fat and are still found in high enough numbers to fill a stringer.

Many folks believe the key to quality bream fishing is the stocking of high numbers of hybrid bream or Georgia Giants. If you don't care about the bass fishing and don't mind the expense of draining the pond every couple of years, stocking these aggressive bream may work. They're a cross of bluegill and green sunfish, and after about two years they return to their native stocks through subsequent reproductions, and you are left with a pond full of green sunfish and bluegill. The green sunfish does not grow to a large size, and they compete with other bream and bluegill in the pond. Once this happens, it is best to resort to pulling the plug and starting over.

Many people brag about how quickly these hybrid bream grow when placed on a supplemental feeding program. What they don't realize is coppernose bluegill respond just as well to floating fish food. The coppernose is the subspecies of bluegill grown by most hatch-

eries and most commonly stocked in Georgia. They grow quick, and big when fed and don't have the management hassles of the hybrid bream.

Other fish may be better suited for stocking in ponds that are less than one acre. Trout can be stocked in October once the water cools and may survive as late as June in some middle and north Georgia ponds. The brown trout can tolerate slightly warmer temperatures but may not be as aggressive as rainbows. Just remember they need higher oxygen than most other species and will go belly up once they can't find water colder than 70 degrees.

Channel catfish can be stocked with bream and bass at a stocking density up to 200 per acre with little negative effects if fed floating fish food. Some ponds less than a half acre in size do well when stocked with just channel catfish. Stock any time of the year at a rate up to 500/acre if the fish are being fed. If not, less than 250/acre would be better.

Hybrid striper/white bass, or "wipers" as they say up north, will grow quickly in a pond when fed a pelleted

