

acre on smaller ponds and one per acre in larger lakes. There are many items you can use for cover. Pallets work well because they provide both cover and lots of surface area for shad and minnows to lay eggs. Just keep in mind some items might hold fish, but can you get them out of there if you hook one? Also, I'm not a fan of using tires — lots of work for a small amount of useful cover.

There is only so much food to go around. You need to limit the competition, and this means harvesting bass or competitive species. Other species that might compete directly with bass are crappie, chain pickerel, bowfin and large catfish. Other species may also compete with bluegill for food, which in turn limits the bass forage base. Remove all competitive species when caught for the goal of growing larger bass.

A selective bass-harvest program is in order. Start with the bass that are the most common size. If you catch mostly 10- to 12-inch bass, remove them. Also, you can set a size limit and remove any bass under that size. This size limit will change over time, according to your goals. Larger bass should be over the hump and healthy — if not, remove them as well.

How many pounds to harvest is a little more difficult to figure. A good starting point for most is 20 to 30 pounds per acre. Base this rate on fertility and relative weight. Here is an example: 10-acre fertile lake with stunted 10- to 12-inch bass means remove 30 pounds divided by 0.5 (average weight of bass) x 10 acres = 600 bass. I think it is time for a fish fry, and it is hard to beat the fillet from a 10-inch bass. You will know you're getting close to your goal because these bass will become more difficult to catch. There will be a lag period, but you will start to see the bass fatten up.

The take-home message here is that you should provide the best water quality to keep the fish thriving and alive, add some cover for better habitat, boost the production, but don't forget to decrease the competition.

The final step is to boost the groceries with fish stocking. It is best to do this after you have "thinned the herd" to steal the deer term. This will lead to better survival of stocked fish. We will discuss stocking next month, as well as supplemental feeding, harvest selection and bass genetics, in our third and final articles in this series on fish-pond management.



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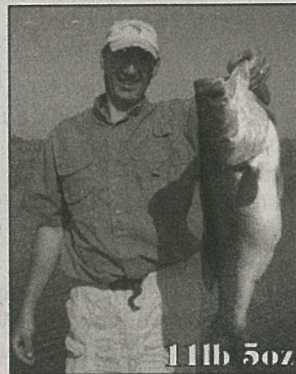
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