

## Managing Ponds for Good Fishing



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This information was compiled from specific fact sheets mentioned below.

Many ponds in Oklahoma can be managed successfully for recreational fishing, but differences between ponds must be considered.

- Ponds an acre or larger can be stocked with largemouth bass, bluegill, and channel catfish.
- Ponds smaller than an acre can be stocked with channel catfish alone or in combination with hybrid bluegill, but small ponds do not provide sustainable largemouth bass fishing.
- Muddy ponds are unsuited for bass and bluegill stocking, but may provide a suitable habitat for catfish and hybrid bluegill, if they are regularly fed pelleted fish food.
- When considering the suitability of an existing pond for fish stocking, you should first have water testing conducted. Contact your county extension office and see [L-420 "Water Quality Testing and Fish Health"](#) to learn more.

### Stocking Fingerlings

Unless advised otherwise by a fisheries biologist, only stock fingerlings in ponds without existing fish populations, because they are likely to be eaten quickly. Stocking recommendations can be found in [NREM-9209 "Improve Fishing in Your Pond."](#)

The Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation offers free largemouth bass, bluegill, and channel catfish fingerlings. You do not have to allow public fishing access to stock your pond with ODWC fingerlings. For details, see [CR-9205, "Fingerlings for Pond Stocking."](#)

Alternatively, you can buy from private hatcheries. This allows you to stock a variety of species and to get larger sized fingerlings. Always inspect the stock before you buy and ask the supplier for the details of their guarantee. Check fingerlings closely for signs of disease, and reject all of them if some appear sick; disease can spread rapidly among fish populations. Also check closely to make sure no undesirable fish have been mixed in: crappie, bullheads (mudcats), flathead catfish, green sunfish (google eye perch), golden shiners, goldfish, or shad.



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## Selective Harvest

Selective harvest is essential to maintain good bass and bluegill fishing. Incorrect harvesting will throw bass and bluegill populations out of balance. For the first three years after stocking a new or renovated pond, return all caught bass to ensure good fishing in years to come.

Beginning in year four:

- Maintain detailed records of the bass, bluegill, and catfish removed from your pond.
- Remove between 25 and 50 bass measuring 12 inches or shorter per year per acre.
- Return any bass 12 to 18 inches long to the pond.
- Bass longer than 18 inches should be removed according to your objectives: If you want to produce a few large bass, harvest them heavily; if you want to maintain a greater number of large bass, harvest them lightly.
- Bluegill may be kept or returned as desired.
- Channel catfish should be managed by restocking every few years to replace those removed. If large bass are present, stock catfish ten inches or longer.

Do not put out tires or other spawning containers to encourage catfish reproduction, as this can lead to the pond being overwhelmed by larger numbers of catfish than bass can control. Never dump unused baitfish into your pond or allow unplanned stocking of fish, including fish caught elsewhere, unless advised to do so by a fisheries biologist.

Time spent properly harvesting your pond and educating others to follow the above harvest guidelines will pay off by maintaining balanced populations of healthy fish. See [NREM-9209 "Improve Fishing in Your Pond"](#).

## Further Reading

For more in-depth information and guidance on related pond topics, please consult the following fact sheets at <http://osufacts.okstate.edu/docushare/dsweb/View/Collection-301>:

- NREM-2883 "Pond Management for Livestock, Fish, and Wildlife"
- NREM-9206 "Common Pond Problems"
- SRAC-140 "Forage Species: Range, Description, and Life History"
- SRAC-481 "Development and Management of Fishing Leases."



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