

# ODNR Division of Wildlife

## Ohio Pond Management: Stocking the Pond

<http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife/Home/fishing/pond/stocking/tabid/6233/Default.aspx>

Most Popular Pond Fish	How Many & What Sizes of Fish to Stock	When & How to Stock Fish	Stocking Other Types of Fish
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Some of the finest fishing in Ohio for largemouth bass, bluegills, and channel catfish can be found in farm ponds that have been properly stocked and managed. New ponds are usually stocked with fingerling largemouth bass, bluegills, and channel catfish, whereas ponds with established fish populations may periodically be supplemented by stocking larger fishes. Successful stocking is as easy as determining the type of fishing a pond owner desires and the current condition of the pond.

A properly stocked and managed pond will provide years of quality fishing. Stocking the proper kinds, sizes, and numbers of fishes will start a pond in the right direction. Most Ohio ponds are ideal for largemouth bass, bluegills, and channel catfish, and all three provide excellent fishing and fine eating. An initial stocking of a combination of these fishes is usually recommended for new or renovated ponds. Properly managed largemouth bass and bluegills will produce self-sustaining populations, whereas channel catfish usually require periodic restocking.

Channel catfish are often considered “bonus fish” because they don’t interfere with the other pond fish, but provide extra fishing and harvest opportunities. Redear sunfish can also be stocked as a “bonus fish” in combination with bluegills and are popular because they rarely become overabundant and often grow to large sizes. However, they can be more difficult to catch than bluegills.



Another fish which is occasionally stocked in farm ponds is the triploid grass carp, or white amur. Unlike largemouth bass, bluegills, redear sunfish, and catfish, grass carp are not stocked for sport or to eat, but to control or eliminate nuisance aquatic vegetation. [Learn more about grass carp.](#)

### The Most Popular Pond Fish

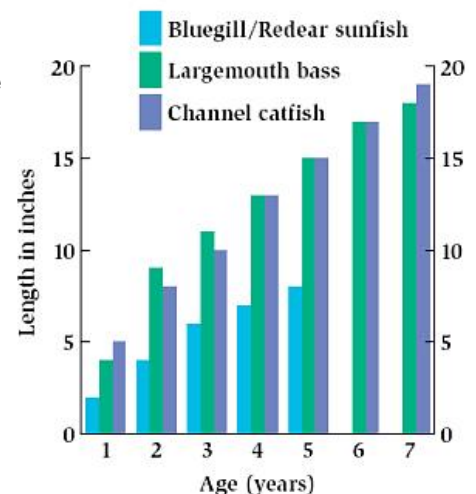
**Largemouth Bass.** The largemouth bass is the top predator in Ohio ponds. It is the largest member of the sunfish family, which also includes the bluegills and redear sunfish.

In Ohio, most largemouth bass begin spawning at age three when they are 10 to 12 inches long. Spawning starts during May when water temperatures reach 60°F and is usually completed by mid-June. The male builds a nest by using his tail to fan out a saucer-shaped depression on the bottom in one to six feet of water. After the female deposits eggs in the nest, the male fertilizes them and guards the nest until the eggs hatch in 4 to 14 days.

Young largemouth bass leaving the nest eat tiny microscopic animals, called zooplankton. As largemouth bass grow, they switch to a diet of insects, crayfish, and small fish. Adult largemouth bass in ponds usually eat bluegills and small largemouth bass, although their diets can be quite variable. Growth of largemouth bass is also rather variable, depending on food availability and habitat suitability.

Most largemouth bass live from four to six years, but some may live to 10 years old or more. Even though the average size of an adult largemouth bass is only one or two pounds, fish up to five pounds or larger are not

Figure 2.1. Typical growth of fish in Ohio farm ponds.



uncommon in Ohio ponds. In fact, the current Ohio record largemouth bass of 13 pounds, 2 ounces was caught from a farm pond in 1976.

**Bluegills.** Bluegills are not only important as food for largemouth bass, but are also very popular among anglers for both sport and the table. Bluegills are usually the pond fish most eager to bite and put up a good fight on light tackle despite their small size.



Most bluegills can spawn by age two when they are about three inches long. Spawning begins two to four weeks later than for largemouth bass when the water temperature reaches 70°F. Even though the spawning period usually begins in late May, it often continues through the summer.



Bluegills build nests similar to, but smaller than those built by largemouth bass. Many nests are built close together in a relatively small area one to four feet deep. However, male bluegills rarely guard nests for more than three to five days.

Young bluegills feed on tiny microscopic plants, called phytoplankton, and zooplankton. The diet of adults often includes insects, snails, small crayfish, fish eggs, and very small fishes. Bluegills can grow to six inches in two to four years when plenty of food and space are available

**Redear Sunfish.** The redear sunfish, or “shellcracker,” is the southern cousin of the bluegill. The name “shellcracker” came about from this fish’s frequent eating of snails, which it can crush with specialized teeth in its throat. Since their introduction into Ohio during the early 1930s, redear sunfish have been widely stocked into lakes and ponds.

Redear sunfish spawning is similar to that of bluegills, but they produce fewer offspring. Redear sunfish are usually stocked in combination with largemouth bass and bluegills because they rarely provide enough food for largemouth bass by themselves. Growth of redear sunfish is similar to that of bluegills.

**Channel Catfish.** Channel catfish are most at home in large streams, lakes or reservoirs, but they also survive and grow very well when stocked in ponds. These fish are primarily bottom feeders, preferring live or dead insects, crayfish, fish, and occasionally aquatic plants. They can also be easily trained to feed on commercial food pellets. Pond owners who stock channel catfish should be aware that in some shallow ponds these fish may stir up the bottom and cause the water to become muddy. Since channel catfish rarely reproduce in ponds, if they become a problem by creating muddy water, the pond owner can harvest the catfish in the pond and simply stop stocking them. Ohio anglers typically catch channel catfish in the 14- to 16-inch size range, although larger fish up to 26 inches are not uncommon.

### How Many and What Sizes of Fish to Stock

**Table 2.1. Recommended stocking rates of fingerling fish for new or renovated ponds.**

Stocking combination	Number of fish to stock per acre			
	Bass	Bluegill	Redear	Catfish
Bass-bluegill	100	500		
Bass-bluegill-catfish	100	500		100
Bass-redear	100		500	
Bass-bluegill-redear	100	350	150	
Bass-bluegill-redear-catfish	100	350	150	100



Stocking the recommended sizes and numbers of fish is very important for good fishing. Fingerling fish one to three inches long are recommended for stocking new or renovated ponds. Starting a pond off by stocking larger fish is tempting, but can lead to an “unbalanced” pond with too many fish of one kind and too few of another. Stocking larger fish can also be very expensive. Table 2.1 (*above*) shows how many fish of each kind to stock depending on the desired combination.

Whereas stocking fingerlings is recommended for new or renovated ponds, occasional stockings of larger fishes, or periodic restocking of channel catfish may be necessary in ponds with established fish populations. Stocking intermediate size fishes is recommended at reduced rates compared to fingerlings. For example, if largemouth bass or bluegills need to be supplemented, stocking four- to six-inch largemouth bass at the reduced rate of 50 per acre, or two to four-inch bluegills at the reduced rate of 250 per acre may be appropriate. Channel catfish should be at least eight inches long for periodic restocking so they are not eaten by adult largemouth bass. Stocking these larger channel catfish is recommended at the reduced rates of 25 to 50 per acre.

### When and How to Stock Fish

Stocking fishes need not be delayed once a new or renovated pond has filled. Although stocking during cooler seasons is a little easier on the fish, the time of year a pond is stocked is not all that important. Ponds are often stocked in the fall because fish tend to be more available from commercial fish dealers at that time.

Fish stocked in ponds need to be in the best possible condition. The person stocking the pond should try to avoid rough handling or extreme water temperature changes when transporting fish to the pond. Fishes must be carefully acclimated if the water temperature in the hauling container differs more than 5°F from the pond water. This is often done by placing the hauling container, usually a sealed plastic bag, into the pond and allowing the water in the bag to reach the same temperature as the pond. Another method is to gradually add pond water to the container until the temperatures are similar. With either method, acclimation time should be about 30 minutes.



Fishes for your pond should be obtained from a licensed commercial fish propagator. This is recommended over obtaining your own fish from local streams, rivers or lakes because you may accidentally introduce undesirable types of fish, parasites, or even diseases. The Ohio Division of Wildlife does not provide fish for private ponds; Division hatcheries only provide fish for **public** fishing waters.

### Stocking Other Types of Fish

Largemouth bass, bluegills, redear sunfish, and channel catfish are the most appropriate fishes for stocking the majority of Ohio ponds. Experimenting with other types is not recommended if the pond owner is interested in easy and inexpensive maintenance of a quality fishing pond. Very few ponds are exceptions to this rule because few ponds have the unique conditions that make stocking other fishes possible. For example, spring fed, highly oxygenated ponds that remain below 75°F through the summer may support trout, but are very rare in Ohio.

Undesirable fishes for a pond include green sunfish, hybrid sunfishes, white crappies, black crappies, yellow perch, bullheads, common carp, and gizzard shad. (see pictures) Each of these types of fish can take over a pond, compete with the desirable fish for food and space, and ruin the quality of fishing. They are usually introduced into ponds by accident, or by well-intended “stockings” from a neighbor. Once they become established, undesirable fishes can be difficult to eliminate.

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