



Fish Stocking

Source – IDNR Fisheries – www.ifishillinois.org

Ponds in Illinois vary greatly in their fish stocking needs. The owners, managers and users of these ponds also may differ in their sport fishing objectives and require a wide selection of stocking options. Therefore, it is important to discuss pond stocking with a [District Fisheries Biologist](#).

Before the fish stocking decision is made, careful analyses of pond characteristics and angler preferences must be made. Some of the factors affecting the decision include pond type, size, depth, water chemistry, fertility, existing fish population, expected fishing pressure and harvest, and angler desires.

The most widely used and successful stocking combination for ponds in Illinois is largemouth bass, channel catfish, bluegill and redear sunfish. These species are popular among fishermen, and are biologically adapted to a wide variety of pond conditions. These species effectively utilize natural and artificial foods, and are compatible with many other species that might be stocked later. The concept of this stocking combination is that the bluegill eat small aquatic insects and in turn serve as food for bass. The bass control the numbers of small fish so that those remaining grow to large size.

One of the most important points in producing a viable sportfish population is to stock the pond correctly initially.

Follow these tips:

1. Do not go to another lake or river, catch some fish and stock them into your pond.
2. If possible, do not allow anyone to put fish into your pond at any time.
3. In central Illinois, pond should be stocked with 500-700 bluegill per surface acre, 0-300 redear sunfish per acre, 100 largemouth bass and 100 channel catfish per acre. These fish should be fingerlings. Do not stock adult fish (see 2 and 3).
4. Every other year, thereafter, stock 15-30 8-10" channel catfish per acre.
5. There is no need to stock any other fish, assuming you are properly managing your pond.
6. Do not stock carp, bullheads, crappie, hybrid sunfish, green sunfish, trout, walleye, extra bass, fathead minnows, etc. in your pond. You are trying to establish a balanced predator-prey population between bass and bluegill. Any other species introduced could negatively affect this balance.

Stocking Tips

Most Illinois ponds provide habitat that is suited for "warm water" fish. The warm water fish species that are stocked with success are the largemouth bass, bluegill, redear and channel catfish. The stocking of "cool" and "cold water" fish as an addition to the basic fish stocking, under the proper conditions and timing, also produces good fishing.

Crappies, though popular, are not generally suitable for stocking in small lakes and ponds. Crappies are prolific spawners and produce large numbers of offspring which can quickly overpopulate. High numbers of bass, which results in slow growth rates, must be maintained to provide desired rates of predation on crappie

Some pond owners are reluctant to stock bluegill because of their reputation for overpopulating. The cause for most bluegill problems is traceable to overharvest of largemouth bass and/or to the overharvest of large bluegill. Redear sunfish, in limited situations are substituted for the bluegill. In most cases, they are generally stocked in combination with the bluegill at a ratio of 70 percent bluegill to 30 percent redear. The redear is a southern species and generally doesn't survive the winter, north of Interstate 80. Bass and bluegill are sometimes stocked alone if redear and channel catfish are not desired.

Fingerling fish (1 to 3 inches) are recommended for the initial stocking of new or rehabilitated ponds. It is essential that no fish life exists in the pond before the initial stocking. The single exception is to stock breeder- sized fathead minnows, which will create an abundant food supply that will eventually be eliminated by bass. Fathead minnows are available from [private fish dealers](#). Other minnow species can cause problems

Other Links

http://www.ifishillinois.org/programs/aquatic_mgmt.html

http://www.ifishillinois.org/publications/aquatic_plants.pdf

http://www.ifishillinois.org/publications/Lake_Management.pdf