

FISH POND MANAGEMENT 101

The average urban pond is managed for good looks, not for fish or wildlife. Visit most, and you'll find a close-cropped lawn running all the way to the water's edge. Look into the water itself, and you're likely to see a bottom scoured clean of vegetation by overused herbicides. However, with some knowledge and an initial investment of capital, a pond can be "aquascaped" with native plants so that it's more economical to maintain, improves fishing, attracts waterfowl, benefits wildlife, and is attractive, too.



BULRUSH

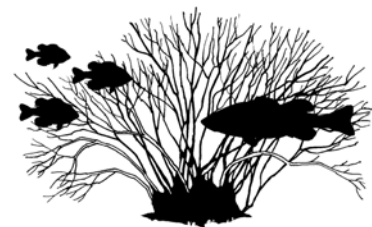
① VEGETATION

Probably the single most important factor determining the quality of an urban lake or pond is the type and amount of vegetation present. Undesirable aquatic plants (such as water lettuce, torpedo grass, and water hyacinth) have limited wildlife value or can rapidly overgrow more desirable species. These plants should be controlled before beneficial species (bulrush, pickerelweed, arrowhead, and eelgrass) are introduced to a pond. In some cases, it may be necessary to introduce grass carp to control hydrilla. Desirable plant species are attractive, provide both food and cover for fish and wildlife, help prevent bank erosion, and take up pond nutrients that would otherwise contribute to algae blooms or growth of unwanted plants. While all ponds can benefit from such plantings, those with a shallow slope to the bank and convoluted (rather than straight) shorelines provide more bank area for plant growth. Even beneficial plants will eventually require some control, but the goal should be to control plant cover, not eliminate it.



ARROWHEAD

② FISH ATTRACTORS



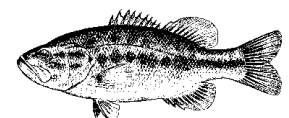
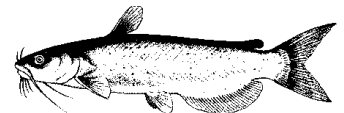
Fish attractors can supplement the cover in a pond that already has good vegetation growth. In some ponds (old shell pits with rock bottoms and very few plants, for example), fish attractors may be the only practical method of adding cover. Natural fish attractors, such as those made from brush or old orange trees anchored by cinder blocks, are economical to assemble but must be refurbished every several years. Artificial attractors made from PVC and other synthetic materials will cost more but can last almost indefinitely.

③ STOCKING FISH

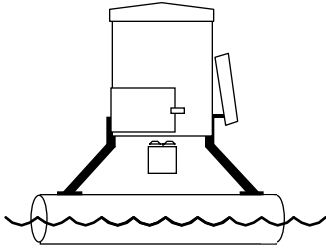
There are two points to keep in mind regarding stocking of fish. First, most lakes will already have an established population of largemouth bass and bluegill, and it is usually not necessary to stock them. If the resident fish are unusually small or scarce, it is probably due to a lack of forage or cover. The

more basic problem (most often lack of beneficial vegetation) needs to be dealt with first, and adding new fish to this struggling population will probably only make matters worse. Second, if it is decided that fish are indeed to be stocked, there must be an adequate food supply available for the new arrivals. Since most older lakes will

already contain a resident fish population, fish feeders (in the case of catfish or bluegill) or plenty of minnow and insect forage (in the case of largemouth bass) should already be present before stocking occurs. For newer lakes with few or no resident fish, there should be enough vegetative cover (and, therefore, a source of forage) established before stocking.

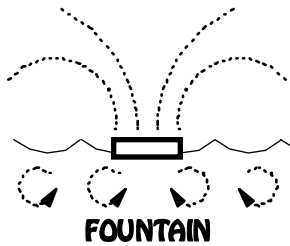


④ FISH FEEDERS



Automated fish feeders are the most effective way to provide additional food for stocked (or resident) fish. Usually powered by a battery kept charged by a solar panel, fish feeders are generally quite reliable and require little maintenance. Many urban ponds would benefit from a fish feeder or two. A variety of feeds are available. Standard catfish chow does well for all-around use, including bluegill and redear sunfish as well as catfish. For growing out small or stunted fish, high-protein foods compressed into smaller pellets are available (but are also more expensive).

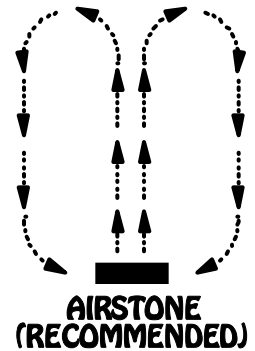
Sinking fish food is preferred to floating, as this reduces (but won't eliminate) the problems of nuisance birds collecting on the pond and consuming food intended for fish. Fish feeders can be mounted on a dock or pier, or on a swing-arm mounted on shore. If potential theft or vandalism is a problem, feeders can be mounted over the water, either floating on anchored pontoons or hanging between 6" PVC pipes jettied into the pond bottom. A floating design is probably best in south Florida, as it is less susceptible to flooding than fixed mounts. An extra "plus" is that the feeder also acts as a fish attractor—there will almost always be a few fish around the feeder, even hours before or after the feeder is set to feed.



FOUNTAIN

⑤ AERATORS

In ponds where money and time have been invested in enhancing the fishery, an aeration system provides insurance against fish kills due to low oxygen levels. This is especially important during summer, when high water temperatures reduce the oxygen-holding capacity of the water. While ornamental, fountains only provide oxygen to surface waters. An aeration/circulation system utilizing airstones provides oxygen throughout the entire water column, and also mixes the surrounding water from top to bottom. Suppliers are usually able to provide technical assistance in determining the size and number of aerator pumps and airstones required as well as the length of air hose needed.



FOR MORE INFORMATION . . .

This insert merely scratches the surface of effective pond management. The FWC's booklet, Guidelines for Designing and Managing Florida Ponds for Recreational Fishing, provides more detail and lists other sources of information. Also available from the FWC are an Applicator List (of companies that perform aquatic vegetation management), a Producers of Fish for Stocking Purposes list, and Fish Feeder and Aerator Basics (which also lists suppliers of feeders and aerators). You can request any of these brochures by contacting John Cimbaro using the information on the front page of this newsletter.

