

Managing Coldwater Ponds For Fishing

General Considerations

The usual way of managing coldwater fish ponds involves the following steps:

1. Stock small trout.
2. Fish for them when they grow to desirable size.
3. Restock as the population diminishes.

Restocking is usually done annually. The interval can be greater if little fishing is done and the trout survive other hazards well. Annual stocking with fingerlings or yearlings is often desired because it creates an interesting population with several year classes and a variety of sizes present. Keep in mind that trout reproduce in few ponds, so replenishment of the population usually depends on stocking. See Chapter 5 for information about the different kinds of trout.

Trout don't thrive when there are other kinds of fish in the pond. Bass, pike and catfish will eat large numbers of trout. Panfish, bullheads, suckers, carp and even the smallest kinds of minnows compete for the main types of food that trout need. When competitor fishes are in a pond, trout growth is poor.

The common idea that trout need small fish as food is mistaken. They usually grow better on invertebrates such as water fleas, insect larvae and crayfish. **KEEP MINNOWS OUT!**

Where to obtain trout for stocking is discussed in Chapter 6.

Determining If a Pond Can Support Trout

Trout need water that is cool and rather rich in dissolved oxygen. The rule of thumb is that water temperature a foot below the surface should

seldom exceed 70°F (21°C) and that dissolved oxygen should rarely fall below 5 parts per million. Dissolved oxygen content of 7-8 ppm is most favorable. Some ponds where the upper water is a little over 80°F (27°C) for a few hours on some days support trout because there is enough deep, cool, well-oxygenated water.

Much depends on pond depth and water supply. As a rule, the deeper, the better. Although trout can often do well in only 6-9 feet (2-3 meters) of water, if there is very strong spring flow, they usually survive and grow even better if that same pond is deepened. For best results, have it deeper than 15 feet (5 meters). See Chapters 3 and 4 for more information on pond depth considerations.

A practical way to find out if a pond can support trout is to simply plant a few. If the pond was properly designed and built there probably isn't much to worry about. But, if there is some doubt, and you don't want to risk the expense of fully stocking the pond, stock a token number of 5-to-8 inch (13-20-cm) trout in springtime or fall. Then, do some test fishing to check on growth and survival over one full year. For a trial program, stock at least 10 fish per acre—in no case less than 20 per pond. If the trout survive both summer and winter, this shows that the pond can support trout.

During the trial period, you may want to keep records of temperature and dissolved oxygen in the pond. This information may warn of deteriorating conditions and provide an explanation if fish do not survive. See Chapter 4 for temperature and oxygen measurement procedures.

