

Quality pond fishing starts with introducing fish to the pond. Stocking is used when a new pond fishery is being created, to supplement ponds that have poor fish production, or to restore fish populations in ponds that have fallen victim to fish kills.

WHAT FISH ARE BEST?

Years of research with fish stockings have demonstrated that largemouth bass and bluegill are the two species best suited for stocking in most ponds. Channel catfish are often stocked along with bass and bluegill to provide additional fishing and harvest opportunities.

Hard-fighting largemouth bass will be the top predators in your pond. Bass are voracious eaters that feed on small fish, frogs, crawfish and insects. In Missouri, largemouth bass live for six to 10 years unless they are harvested.

Bluegills provide food for largemouth bass as well as great sport and excellent table fare for anglers. Bluegills eat everything from microscopic plants and animals to insects, snails, crayfish and small fish. They can reach 6 inches long and start reproducing after just one year. Once introduced into a pond, they usually sustain their numbers through natural reproduction. Bluegills in Missouri may live five to 10 years.

Channel catfish are primarily bottom feeders, eating insects, crayfish and fish. They can



Want Fish?

The Department of Conservation provides young-of-the-year largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish from 1 to 4 inches long to start or restore fisheries in private ponds. The number of fish provided is based on surface area of the impoundment and soil fertility.

Applications for fish are available at Missouri Department of Conservation offices (see page 3 for phone numbers), on the Department's Web site and from most county USDA offices. Completed forms must be submitted to a Department of Conservation Regional Office by July 15.

After the Department receives the application, a Department fisheries biologist or conservation agent will inspect each pond or lake to make sure it qualifies for stocking. The Department's fish stocking policy specifies the following minimum standards for participation.

- The pond or lake must be at least 8 feet deep.
- Water and shoreline must be protected from livestock use. Impoundments over 5 acres need not be fenced.
- The dam must be constructed for permanency and water tightness, and the drainage area should be adequate but not excessive for water storage.
- No undesirable fish, as determined by the impoundment inspector, may be present prior to stocking. Please contact the Department for information about removal of undesirable fish populations.
- Water quality must be sufficient to ensure initial survival of stocked fish and to sustain good fishing.
- Stocking may not adversely affect species of conservation concern.

Inspection results arrive by mail by September 1. Pond owners who are accepted for fish stocking will be notified when the fish are available by the hatchery.

The landowner or designated caretaker must be prepared to make two trips to accept delivery from the hatchery truck at a drop-off site in their county. Pond owners will receive bluegill and channel catfish in the fall, and largemouth bass in the spring of the following year. Fish must be handled according to instructions provided, and all fish must be stocked. They cannot be sold.

Landowners who receive fish from the Department retain full rights to control access to their pond. They are not required to allow fishing by the general public. However, anglers on private ponds that have been stocked with fish from the Department must follow the general fishing regulations listed in the Wildlife Code of Missouri.