

## Pond Facts #11

# Fish for Pennsylvania Ponds

**Whether for aesthetics or for fishing pleasure, most pond owners are interested in stocking and managing fish. Dozens of fish species are suitable for stocking in Pennsylvania ponds, but some species are usually more successful than others.**



A crappie bass from a small pond.

Too often, pond owners indiscriminately stock small numbers of many types of fish in the hopes having a diverse fish population. This often produces disappointing results. This fact sheet describes the common fish species that are most suitable for use in small farm ponds in Pennsylvania.

### Bass and Bluegill

Bass and bluegill are by far the most popular and successful combination of fishes in Pennsylvania ponds. Either smallmouth or largemouth bass are suitable although largemouth bass are the more common choice. Both bass and bluegill thrive in the warm water present in most ponds.

Bass offer excellent sport fishing opportunities, while bluegills provide a food base for bass and good fishing for youngsters. When stocking these fish together, bass should

be one year older than the bluegill. A stocking rate of 100 bass and 200 to 500 bluegill has been successful in Pennsylvania. Care should also be taken not to disturb bass during the spring while they are on their nests.

With proper management, a bass and bluegill combination can provide an excellent pond fishery. You can fine-tune the size and number of both bass and bluegill by regulating the harvest. Common mistakes are overharvesting bass and underharvesting bluegill. See Pond Facts #12: Pond Fisheries Management for more details on stocking and harvesting recommendations for bass and bluegill.

### Sunfish

Other types of sunfish are sometimes stocked instead of bluegill, usually with less success. These tend to be harder to catch than bluegill and have unpredictable survival rates. If your pond suffers from swimmer's itch, a rash-causing parasite carried by waterfowl and snails, you can stock pumpkinseed sunfish in place of bluegills because they feed on snails and reduce the parasite.

### Trout

Most ponds cannot sustain trout year-round because of warm summer water temperatures (above about 74°F). Adult trout can be stocked during spring or fall and harvested before summer in a "put-and-take" fishery. Brook trout are preferred because they are generally the easiest to catch, but they are more sensitive to warm water temperature. Rainbow trout are also satisfactory and are better fighting fish. Brown trout are not recommended because they are difficult to fish out of the pond. Permanent trout ponds are possible where a continual source of cold water keeps the pond cool during summer or in especially deep ponds. Trout fingerlings can be stocked in cold-water ponds, but they usually do not reproduce and rarely live more than three years. Restocking will be necessary every three to four years.

## Perch

Yellow perch may be stocked for ice fishing. Since each female produces over 75,000 eggs, they quickly reproduce and often overpopulate the pond with stunted fish. They can produce more satisfactory results if stocked in combination with other species, like bass, that will help keep their population under control. However, little experience exists in Pennsylvania ponds with such a combination of fish.

## Black Crappie

Black crappie are active throughout winter, making them popular for ice fishing. They do best in large impoundments with cool, deep water and extensive underwater habitat. As such, they are usually recommended only for lakes.

## Channel Catfish

Channel catfish have been somewhat successful in Pennsylvania ponds when stocked with largemouth bass. A stocking density of 500 catfish to 100 bass is recommended. Channel catfish can reach very large sizes, but their survival and reproduction is unpredictable in Pennsylvania ponds.

## Brown Bullhead

This small catfish rarely grows larger than 12 inches in ponds. It is an excellent panfish and sport fish for many anglers. They tolerate low water quality, such as high water temperatures, muddy water, and low dissolved oxygen. Brown bullhead are problematic because they are prolific; the result is a large population of stunted catfish that stir up the mud on the bottom of the pond while looking for food. They may be most useful in ponds that are unable to support more desirable fish species.

## Golden Shiners

This large, native minnow can reach 10 inches. It is a good forage fish that is often stocked as a food source for bass. Like bluegill, they provide good forage because some grow large enough to avoid predators and breed. Shiners do best in ponds with aquatic vegetation that provides cover and breeding locations. They are also an excellent baitfish for muskie, pike, and pickerel. Shiners can be stocked with bass at a density of about 400 adults (2 to 4 inches) per surface acre.

## Fathead Minnows

These minnow are also native to Pennsylvania but are smaller (2 to 3 inches) than golden shiners. Like channel catfish, fatheads are tolerant of poor water quality. They breed prolifically, which makes them an excellent baitfish. Bass easily prey upon fathead minnows, so they must be stocked more frequently than golden shiners. As a result, they are not recommended in ponds with well-established bass populations.

## Darters

Many types of native darters are found in Pennsylvania. They are small, bottom-dwelling forage fish. Since they are intolerant of high water temperatures, muddy water, and other problems, the presence of darters indicates high water quality. Most darters will do well, but Johnny Darters and Tesselated Darters are recommended for ponds.

## Fish to Avoid

Walleye, northern pike, muskellunge, and pickerel are not suitable for small ponds in Pennsylvania and should be avoided when stocking.

## Where to Get Fish

Ponds may be stocked with fish caught from other ponds, lakes, or streams as long as the fish are of legal size and were caught during the legal fishing season. In addition, Pennsylvania has dozens of commercial fish hatcheries. A list of commercial fish hatcheries summarized by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture can be accessed at the [Penn State Extension Water Quality](#) website.

## More Information

More detailed information on pond fisheries management can be found in *Management of Fish Ponds in Pennsylvania*. This 30-page publication is available free of charge from your county's Penn State Cooperative Extension office. You can find many other publications related to all aspects of pond management at the [Penn State Extension Water Quality](#) website.

Prepared by Bryan R. Swistock, extension associate, and Jay Stauffer, professor of ichthyology.

## Contact Information

### **Bryan Swistock**

Extension Associate; Water Resources Coordinator  
[brs@psu.edu](mailto:brs@psu.edu)  
814-863-0194

---

## **extension.psu.edu**

**Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research and extension programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.**

Where trade names appear, no discrimination is intended, and no endorsement by Penn State Cooperative Extension is implied.

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

Penn State is an equal opportunity, affirmative action employer, and is committed to providing employment opportunities to minorities, women, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and

other protected groups. Nondiscrimination:  
<http://guru.psu.edu/policies/AD85.html>.

© The Pennsylvania State University 2015

Publication code: XH0018