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An Effective Feeding Program Can Make Big Bluegills

by Kendric Nutt

Most pond owners who manage for bass and bluegill are familiar with the practice of directly feeding bluegill. Floating fish feed is widely available at local feed and seed dealers, and most pond owners have, at one time, "fed" their bluegill. However, as with other aspects of pond management, the majority of pond owners are in the dark regarding the principles of properly feeding a fish population. Without adhering to a few basic principles, a pond owner may be wasting both time and money and not realizing any real improvement in the bluegill population. This month's article will explain the principles of feeding a bluegill population and how to set up an effective feeding program in your pond.

First of all, we should consider what a feeding program can accomplish and what the pond owner wishes to accomplish. As with feeding other wildlife, feeding fish in a pond can increase the level of fertility and the pond's fish production potential over and above that achieved by simply fertilizing alone. This means growing more pounds of fish per acre. Volumes of published research in aquaculture proves that regular feeding increases fish production over fertilization alone. Regular feeding increases the fish's growth rate, spawning rate (frequency and magnitude) and condition (degree of plumpness). Over time and compared to an unfertilized pond or a pond with fertilization only, it will also result in larger fish.

The second main function of feeding bluegill, for the recreational pond owner, is to concentrate fish for ease of location and catching. Many pond owners like to concentrate bluegill around a pier or other favorite area for viewing and catching, particularly when children are fishing also.

To no one's surprise, most pond owners want more and bigger fish. However, concentrating fish for ease of locating and catching is usually of equal importance. With coppernose bluegill, the extremely aggressive surface feeding bluegill subspecies (*Lepomis macrochirus purpurescens*), simply watching the fish feed is a pleasure itself.



Bluegill weighing over 1 lb. can be produced with a good feeding program.

In this Issue

- **Pond Management**
An Effective Feeding Program can Make Big Bluegills
by Kendric Nutt
- **Game Management**
Success Story - Wild Quail Management on a Large Area
by Clay Sisson
- **Game Management**
Antler Abnormalities in White-tailed Deer
by Dr. M. Keith Causey
- **Game Management**
Late Season Release – When Should You Add More Birds?
by Jim Evans
- **Pond Management**
Supplemental Income From Your Farm Pond Growing Fish In Cages - Part II
by David Cline

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