

Fish Attractors for Mississippi Farm Ponds

The primary purpose for most farm ponds in Mississippi is recreational fishing. With proper management, even small ponds can provide excellent fishing and recreational experiences. One of the best ways to enhance the fishing experience is to create fish attractors at strategic locations in a pond or lake with a well-managed fish population.

Game fish such as bass and bream are attracted to cover or shelter of all types. Shelters provide areas where prey fish can hide from predators and where predators can find prey species. They also provide spawning areas and harbor large numbers of invertebrates and insects that small fish feed upon. Natural cover that provides shelter for fish includes ditches, creeks, trees and stumps, vegetation, and irregular features of the bottom. In ponds where natural shelter for fish is missing or is inadequate, artificial structures can be established to act as fish shelters that will attract and hold fish.

Trees as Fish Attractors

Suitable fish shelters to increase fish harvest and angling success in existing ponds can be developed from small trees such as blackjack oak, post oak, or cedar. For small ponds, bushy-crowned trees 10 to 15 feet tall are sufficient. In larger lakes, larger trees can be used. In ponds of less than 1 acre, one brush shelter is enough. Larger ponds need one or two shelters per acre.

Select attractor sites carefully. Access for fishermen is important. Good locations are found in water 5 to 10 feet deep near creek channels, off points, or at dropoffs. Drive a stake or use a floating buoy to mark the shelter site permanently. Place three to five trees at each location. Green trees will usually sink without weights. Some trees, such as cedar, will float, and weights should be added to these varieties to keep the shelters in place.

Many new pond sites have trees in the basin, and most of these should be cut and salvaged or piled and burned. Some trees, bushes, and brush piles can be retained, however, to use in establishing fish shelters. Where possible, up to 10 percent of the pond area should have some tree shelter.

Leave bushes and trees in deeper water areas, along creek runs, and in the middle of ponds and lakes. Leave the trees in small clumps, then cut the standing trees about 2 feet above the normal water level and anchor the brushy tops to the bases of the stumps. The tall stumps will serve as permanent markers for the shelter locations. Do not leave trees or bushes in shallow areas, in narrow coves, or along pond banks, because these areas will become difficult to fish and may develop aquatic vegetation problems. Also, too much cover in shallow water will make it hard for bass to control bream successfully and will prevent navigation of the entire shoreline by boat.

Fish will immediately inhabit the brush-top shelters. Go fishing!

Gravel Beds as Fish Attractors

Gravel beds are extremely attractive to bream for spawning. Select an area in water 2 to 4 feet deep that is convenient for fishing. Drive a stake to mark the spot, and place washed gravel (1/2" to 1" in diameter) around the stake, creating a bed of gravel 4 to 6 inches in depth. A 3- to 5-cubic-yard load will make a gravel bed 12 to 15 feet in diameter. Gravel beds can be added to flooded sites or strategically placed during drawdowns. Avoid sites that have a high silt erosion problem.

Bream will be using gravel beds frequently throughout the spring and summer. Remember to keep all the bream you catch; never throw them back into the pond, no matter how small they may be, unless advised by a fisheries biologist.

Other Fish Attractors

If trees or brush piles are not available or conveniently obtained, other types of structures can be placed in the pond to attract fish. Old automobile tires make excellent fish attractors. Various configurations can be developed, including tri-tire pyramids, multiple-tire pyramids, tire chains, and tire trees. If tires are not attached to a stationary structure, they should be ventilated by drilling holes in several places. Ventilation will prevent formation of air pockets that would cause the tires to float to the surface.

Another effective fish attractor is called a stake bed. A group of 2- by 2-inch stakes are driven into the bottom in a random or geometric arrangement in strategic locations. Old culverts and concrete blocks can be arranged to provide good cover and are usually available for little or no cost. Development of irregular bottom features such as ditches and underwater dirt mounds also provides fish-attracting cover and creates excellent places to fish.

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