

## Caring for your Pond

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So you may have had a pond for some time, recently purchased property with a pond, or are thinking about digging a pond. For those of you who may be getting into pond care, you will likely first wonder where you should even start. Whom can I go to in order to find information on caring for my pond? How do I control weeds and algal blooms around my pond? What tips are out there to keep my pond healthy? These are questions that loom in the minds of many pond owners, so let us look at how we can have healthy, vibrant ponds that aid to the aesthetics of our properties and that are good for recreational opportunities such as swimming or fishing.

Let us first start with how to find information on general pond care. A simple search of the internet can uncover troves of information of general pond care tips from organizations such as the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), OSU Extension, Michigan State Extension, Purdue Extension, in addition to Soil & Water Conservation Districts (SWCD). These resources can get you started and pointed in the right direction but a true gauge of your pond will be obtained with a site visit and assessment. Each pond will be different in how it is cared for such as the products that can be used so it is important to always call in the experts to do a site visit so they can provide recommendations that are tailored to your specific needs.

One important tip to consider is to take an assessment of your pond to obtain a glimpse of the current water quality. ODNR is one government agency that can connect you with a consultant who has knowledge on maintaining aquatic vegetation, cost-share programs, which may help to cover part of your costs, along with determining if your pond is at the appropriate depth to support aquatic life. According to the ODNR Ohio Pond Handbook, the exact depth of your pond is determined by the intended use of the pond. It is their recommendation that there should be a minimum of eight feet of depth in at least 25% of the pond while depths increase more to the range of ten to twelve feet in our northwestern section of the state in order to provide adequate depth for fish to overwinter.

Shoreline areas should also be maintained as well to support spawning ground for fish, prevent out of control growth of aquatic vegetation, but that of which suits your recreational needs. It is recommended by ODNR to have shorelines constructed and maintained in a 3:1 slope ratio, which means that for every three feet of distance, you have one foot of depth, which will provide the ideal conditions for spawning in addition to allowing fish such as largemouth bass and bluegill to have some cover and feeding areas. Not only are those benefits provided, but this construction will help to minimize the over maintenance needs of your pond.

Many questions always seem to arise around the fact of how much and of what type of fish should be stocked in the pond. The answer in this situation is again to follow recommendations that are suited to your individual pond. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources suggests a mixture of largemouth bass, bluegill,

channel catfish, and readear sunfish, all of which provide for a good food source and fishing. Grass carp tend to be a good fish to stock in your pond if you are looking for a means of biological aquatic weed control. It is important to properly manage the population of your bluegill and largemouth bass, as they will essentially sustain themselves without the need to continually restock while the channel catfish may require some stocking from time to time to sustain a healthy population, according to ODNR.

Before fish are stocked, it is critical to know that fish will need to get used to the pond water should there be a difference of more than 5 degrees Fahrenheit between the bag transporting the fish and your pond water. The most common way this is done is by placing the bag with the fish in it into your pond until the water temperature in the container is the same as your pond. The fish hatchery where your fish are purchased can provide you with detailed information on how much to stock and the proper stocking methods to ensure the health of your fish. Paulding SWCD runs our annual fish sale from January through April each spring for your fish stocking needs. Contact the office if you would like to be placed on our mailing list!

Once the fish are stocked, considerations should be made on maintaining your pond. Common problems such as fish kills or algae can be controlled with proper care. Tractor Supply Company writes that one of the first steps to reduce weed growth is to control runoff from nutrient-rich sources such as lawn clippings, fertilizers, livestock manure, along with leachate from septic tanks. Also, be sure to clean as much of the autumn leaves that fall on your pond as these also contain nutrients that could provide for weed growth. A properly cared for pond will provide for endless recreational and ecological benefits for both you and the environment!