

## Small Lakes Offer Fun Times And Feisty Fish

In today's use-it-up, wear-it-out, eat-it-all world, I can think of no better way to spend your time and effort than fishing small lakes. In fact, creating your own fishery can be quite productive and enjoyable at the same time.

While a lot of species thrive in small lakes and farm ponds, no one will argue the popularity of panfish, namely bluegill, redear sunfish (shellcracker) or the ever-popular hybrids.

If the proper management techniques are implemented, you can turn local farm ponds, small lakes or a watershed acreage into fertile fishing territory in a relatively short period of time.

Practically every state game-and-fish agency will assist you via on-site visits, books, pamphlets and other biological recipes for building your bonanza. From habitat to fertilizers that supplement algae bloom or control weed infestation, fisheries biologists are more than willing to help turn what is just another body of water full of small, stunted sunfish into a fantastic fishery.

Some landowners have also chosen to go the commercial route. This involves management companies coming in and assessing the status of your lake with methods such as electroshocking, mesh-net seining or chemical application to rid the lake of unbalanced rough fish species.

Over the years, many anglers have learned a costly lesson by stocking crappie in small waters. This scenario often creates a problem with overpopulation, resulting in small, stunted year classes due to competition of unlimited appetites with a limited forage base.

Yet some of the biggest bluegill, redear sunfish and hybrid bluegill (bream) are known to come from small waters. Even 1- to 3-acre ponds have great potential, especially if you put the food out in a timely manner. This can be done through the use of automatic feeders

that dispense pellet buffets to a crowd that never seems to get its fill.

Good water quality, balanced aquatics, proper aeration and monitoring acidity levels can yield some memory-making fishing trips — to the tune of 1-pound-plus bluegill and redear — that are sure to put smiles on the faces of all anglers willing to do battle.

Stocking ratios are important. Keep in mind that if a few are good, then adding a lot more isn't necessarily the best step toward successful lake management. I highly recommend you consult with your state fisheries biologists and use their knowledge and experience to get you off on the right foot.

Remember, successful fishing journeys of a thousand casts often begin with just one toss beneath the shade of overhanging willows. It is here where legends are born and dies are cast for future fishermen who become hooked on the sport, courtesy of rusty, humped-back bluegill that sing a tune with your line as it cuts the water in figure 8s. First impressions mean so much, and small lakes can be full of good times because the fish are always there and biting.

I could describe thousands of days spent hauling in hefty slab crappie over the gunwales of my boat, prestigious tournament wins, trophy bass, trout from glacier lakes or walleye from flowing Canadian streams. Yet all these stories came from the seeds sown at nearby ponds and lakes where wet burlap sacks full of fish, canepoles, light-wire hooks and buckets full of crickets and night crawlers dug out behind the barn were as much a part of my fishing career as any of today's accolades.

Even now, when my boat is trimmed up and riding high atop the whitecaps at speeds in excess of 60 mph, I cannot out-run the memories of yesteryear — and rightfully so. The power of the panfish rules. From distant memories,



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they reel us in and serve as a reminder that regardless of how far you go in life, the thrill of tugging sunfish never leaves an angler. You may leave the panfish, but they will never leave you.

To make sure the fishing chain stays intact, create a fishing hole or open up a body of water where anglers of all ages and generations of fish will coincide with early summer days. These often are places where bobwhites whistle for a maiden in distress, owls hoot their wisdom from deep in the cedars and children discover the great joys of fishing between the "What's that?" barrage of questions.

Without a doubt, good times await you around small lakes. It seems only fitting to have some small anglers there, too, where the only thing larger than their imagination is a big fish swimming deep in the lake. 🐟

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