

FISHPOND MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES – FISH SHELTERS

Game fish such as largemouth 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.

Trees as Fish Shelters

Suitable fish shelters 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. Fish will immediately inhabit these shelters.

Select shelter sites carefully. Access for fishing is an important consideration. 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 largemouth bass to control bream successfully and will prevent navigation of the entire shoreline by boat.

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