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News and Information from UT-TSU Extension Wilson County

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Consider Source and Risks Before Adding Fish or Plants to Your Pond

Frequent questions from pond owners often reveals a bad decision by someone in the past. People unintentionally harm pond environments by releasing inappropriate fish, dumping aquarium organisms, transferring water from a river or using contaminated equipment. Inappropriate organisms, or the microscopic hitchhikers on them, in associated water or on equipment can create havoc in a pond, such as harming desired fish populations, introducing diseases or establishing invasive species.

Sources of fish or aquatic plants should be carefully evaluated before stocking a pond. Unseen harmful organisms might be attached to fish or plants, or be present in the associated water. Fish diseases and aquatic parasites can be introduced. Fish acquired from reputable hatcheries seldom have these unwelcome hitchhikers because such organisms interfere with fish production in a hatchery, so most hatcheries actively work to prevent them. However, such hitchhikers are common in public water sources such as lakes and rivers. Thus, transferring fish, plants or water from public lakes or rivers into naïve pond environments is generally not recommended. When such unwanted problems become established in a pond, elimination of the problematic organisms can be very difficult, sometimes nearly impossible. Therefore, prevention of these problems is very important.

Fish stockings into a pond should be carefully planned and conducted. Unplanned stockings can upset relatively delicate predator-prey balances. Establishing another predator in a pond ecosystem (green sunfish, crappie, blue catfish, flathead catfish, etc.) usually reduces biomass of largemouth bass and bluegill through competition by the additional predator and its predation on bass and bluegill. This may be an acceptable outcome when the additional predator fits the owners goals for the pond but otherwise, negative impacts on largemouth bass and bluegill usually are undesirable consequences of the additional predator.

Don’t release seined minnows! When golden shiner or fathead minnow are healthy, sourced from a reputable hatchery, releasing them as leftover bait might be acceptable. However, consider this might not be a good idea to introduce the golden shiner in a pond because it can grow to 9 inches long and compete with bluegill for food. Minnows seined from a river or another impoundment should not be released into a pond because they often include undesirable microscopic hitchhikers and fish species other than golden shiner or fathead minnows. Several undesirable fish species, such as common carp, resemble typical bait minnows and can be unintentionally established in a pond by releasing seined bait into a pond.

Take caution with non-natives either fish or plants. Many fish and plant species sold in the aquarium and water garden trade are not native to the United States. Non-native organism introductions typically cause problems. Many aquatic invasive species problems probably were established in the United Stated via release of live aquarium or water garden organisms

Nets, waders, boats, trailers and equipment used in other water bodies should be cleaned and thoroughly dried for several days before using them in a pond because they also can transfer undesirable organisms into a pond.

Always stop and think and consider the risk. People should consider risks when placing or releasing something into a pond and minimize the risks of introducing undesirable organisms. A little forethought and prevention can prevent many problems. (ref: 2020, Mike Porter, Senior Wildlife and Fisheries, Consultant, Noble Foundation)

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