



## **Pond Fertilization**

**January 27, 2012**

When I recommend using fertilizer and lime, most folks might think I'm just talking about pastures, lawns, and gardens. However proper fertilization and liming of fish ponds can increase three to four times the pounds of fish a pond will support. Unfertilized ponds stocked with bream, bass, and catfish usually have about 100 pounds of fish per surface acre while those receiving adequate amounts of fertilizer typically contain 300 to 400 pounds of fish. Fertilization increases fish production by increasing the amount of phytoplankton (microscopic green plants) which is the base of the food chain in ponds. In properly constructed ponds, an adequate fertilization program also helps control rooted aquatic weeds by having the phytoplankton bloom block sunlight penetration deeper than about 18 inches.

Beginning a fertilization program in February or March is good to establish a phytoplankton bloom before weeds become established. However, you need to make sure that fertilizing is right for you and your pond. Ponds with excessive water flow or shallow ponds (extensive areas less than two feet deep) cannot be effectively fertilized. Given the prolonged rainfall shortage we've experienced, most ponds might be too low to fertilize as well. You also do not need to fertilize ponds with no history of weed problems and very light fish harvests. It serves no purpose to increase pounds of fish in the pond if very few are going to be harvested.

You should only use inorganic fertilizers to fertilize your pond. Use of organic nutrient sources such as manure can cause development of undesirable algae blooms. Many types of granular, liquid, and slow release pond fertilizers are available and which one to use will likely depend on your specific situation. You can contact the Extension office and I will be happy to develop a proper fertilization strategy for your pond. Having a water sample tested through our lab will also help determine nutrient limitations. It is possible to over-fertilize your pond, leading to a fish kill, so proper planning is key.

Liming your pond is another strategy that might increase production. Most ponds in the Southeast have very soft water and will not develop a satisfactory plankton bloom unless lime is added periodically. Dolomitic lime is often the best choice for sportfishing ponds but your water should be sampled to check for pH and ponds that are currently being limed should be checked every three to five years. Although lime can be added at any time, it is best to lime ponds in the fall and winter to allow for the lime to go into solution. In new ponds, lime can be spread directly over the ground at about 50 pounds per surface acre prior to filling. For filled ponds, more specific recommendations will need to be made based on water tests.

Maintaining proper pond fertilization is a year-long process that begins right now. If you want to consider your pond and address your fertilization needs, give us a call at the Extension office for more help.

Are you interested in receiving up to date information directly from the Extension office? We can send you news on agriculture, family and consumer sciences, and 4-H directly to your email or home address. Contact our office at 706-795-2281 and get added to our list of clients today!