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## Farm Pond Fish Management

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Farm ponds are found on private lands across New York State. Most of these ponds are less than an acre in area and provide recreation for the whole family. Often, fishing is a main component of farm pond recreation. To ensure a farm pond will provide decent fishing for many years, it is important for pond owners to practice good management practices.

### Farm Fish Pond License

Prior to stocking fish in your pond, you should obtain a [Farm Fish Pond License](#) from DEC. The license allows the licensee, his immediate family, and his employees to take fish at any time, in any size, in any number, and in any manner as stipulated in his license. The farm fish pond license also serves as a stocking permit, eliminating the need to obtain a separate [DEC fish stocking permit](#)

which is required to stock fish into any waters of the state.

The Farm Fish Pond License is free and is good for five years. You can obtain an application for the license from any [DEC Regional Office](#).

Pond owner's should be aware that the laws governing fishing require all persons 16 years of age and older must have a [fishing license](#) except citizen-resident landowners and lessees or members of their immediate families actually occupying and cultivating farm lands when fishing on such lands. This means that **guests or friends of the pond owner must have a license to fish** the pond even though it is privately-owned. Laws pertaining to seasons, size limits and daily take also apply to owners of private fish ponds unless a farm fish pond license is obtained.

## **Stocking Fish**

Deciding on what fish species to place in your farm pond depends on the pond type (i.e. coldwater or warmwater). Coldwater ponds are usually deeper, spring fed ponds whose surface temperature seldom, if ever, rises above 72 degrees fahrenheit. In contrast, the surface temperature of warmwater ponds remains above 72 degrees fahrenheit for considerable periods in the summer. Coldwater ponds are generally stocked with trout, while warmwater ponds are stocked with largemouth bass.

Trout are unable to reproduce in most farm ponds and must be restocked every two years to maintain satisfactory fishing. A standard stocking rate is 400-600 fall fingerlings (5 to 6 inches long) per surface acre of water. From an angling standpoint, rainbow trout and brook trout are more suitable for stocking than brown trout. Warmwater species of fish have an advantage over trout in the farm pond situation because they can reproduce. Either a largemouth bass/ bluegill combination or bass/ golden shiner combination are generally recommended. However, fathead minnows can be substituted for the bluegill or

golden shiners as the prey species. A standard stocking rate is 100 bass fingerlings per surface acre along with 500 bluegill fingerlings or 200 adult golden shiners. Fathead minnows may be stocked at a rate of 300-400 fingerlings per acre. Generally, bass should be stocked when pond water temperatures are equal to the hatchery water temperatures. Yearlings obtained in the spring should be stocked in May and June. Fingerlings should be stocked in September and October. Bass and shiner or minnow fingerlings can be stocked at the same time. In an established pond, minnow or shiner fingerlings should be stocked a year or two prior to stocking yearling or adult bass. Bass should not be harvested until they have reproduced successfully, which is usually two years after stocking them as fingerlings. Therefore, they may be fished for but only a few should be removed at any one time. Stocking bluegill with the bass provides another species for the angler to enjoy, especially children. However, an intensive amount of fishing pressure must be placed on the bluegill because of its high reproductive ability. In time, if an adequate number of bluegill are not removed, they will overpopulate the pond and become stunted. Research by Cornell University indicates that 15 times as many bluegills as bass can and should be harvested. The average bass/bluegill pond can support annual harvests of only about eleven adult bass per acre. Overharvest of adult bass will obviously tip the balance in favor of bluegills. If the pond owner is only interested in bass or is just an occasional angler, a bass and shiner or minnow combination is a better choice. While bullheads are popular with some anglers, they can overpopulate a pond and become stunted. Furthermore, they are bottom feeders and their foraging often keeps the water muddy. Turbidity will work to the disadvantage of bass if they are present in the pond. Remember, as stated above, you must first obtain a [stocking permit](#) from DEC before stocking fish into any water in the state. Stocking permits are

required for farm ponds because it is important to have accurate records of what fish species are being stocked. Since many ponds have an outlet or the possibility of overflowing, fish have the potential to escape into adjacent natural or public waters. Such accidental introductions can have disastrous effects on native fish species. As such, stocking permits are an attempt to prevent undesirable species from escaping and competing with existing species.

## **Obtaining Fish**

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation does not build, survey or stock private ponds. Since most of the operating funds in DEC's Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources come from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses, field investigations and fish stocking are only carried out on waters open to the general public.

There are a number of private fish hatcheries located across the state where pond owner's can obtain fish. Check with your local [DEC fisheries office](#) for a listing of local hatcheries.

## **Dealing with Possible Problems**

Sometimes pond fishing deteriorates because the pond is overpopulated with fish such as bluegills or bullheads. If this occurs, thin the fish down or eliminate the population entirely and restock with a more desirable species. Minnow traps or a fifty foot seine are ideal for removing small fish from a pond. Use of these devices can be specified in the farm fish pond license. If you want to remove all the fish, it may be necessary to completely drain the pond. Hopefully, a drainpipe was installed when the pond was built. If not, you still may be able to siphon water out or employ a large water pump.

Aquatic weeds are a common problem in ponds. Some weed growth may lead to greater fish production but extensive growth interferes with

both fishing and swimming. The decay of weeds can use up the dissolved oxygen in the water and cause a fish kill during winter months. If you experience excessive aquatic plant growth in your pond, you can obtain a copy of DEC's publication entitled "Aquatic Plant Control in Your Pond." It provides useful information on the different methods used to control aquatic vegetation. A helpful publication is "Fish Management in New York Ponds" (Bulletin 116) from the New York State College of Agriculture at Cornell University. You can obtain a copy by sending your request to the Distribution Center-GP, 7 Business and Technology Park, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14850. There is a small fee. This publication may also be available from your local county cooperative extension office.

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### **Other Links of Interest**

[DEC Regional Office](#) for additional information, contact the office nearest you

[Cornell University](#) for more information about farm ponds

(leaving DEC's site)

[Ponds-- Planning, Design, Construction](#)- pdf publication available at the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service's website

(leaving DEC's site)

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