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As January comes to a close pond owners should begin thinking about fertilizing their ponds. The first question to answer is whether or not you want to fertilize the pond. Does your pond even need fertilizer? Some do while others do not. Ponds that are managed for bass and bream can be fertilized or not depending on the wishes of the pond owner. Ponds with weed problems should not be fertilized without the manager first gaining control over the weeds. This is an important point, which if not considered, can lead to tremendous weed growth, and a larger problem.

It is better to not fertilize a pond at all than to randomly add fertilizer. By feeding (fertilizing) a pond and starving (not fertilizing) a pond you will actually reduce the fishing quality within the pond more so than if you had never fertilized to begin with. A fertilizing schedule is recommended, but it serves only as a general guideline. Every pond is different, and prior to any application of fertilizer, a manager should first determine if the pond needs the added nutrients. This is accomplished by measuring the clarity of the water (known as Secchi Depth). If an eight inch diameter disk with alternating quarters painted white and black can be seen clearly at twenty four inches or greater, the pond needs fertilizer. If it is visible to 18-24 inches, the algal bloom is ideal and fertilizer should not be applied; between 12 and 18 inches the bloom would be considered dense and fertilization would not be recommended. If the visibility is less than 12 inches, the pond is in danger of suffering an algal bloom crash which often times results in a low oxygen event and fish kill if no aeration is provided.

Generally, fertilization begins in February or March, and it ends the last week of October. Following the guidelines above, fertilizer is applied once every two weeks for three applications. After the third application, the interval is extended to every three weeks for three applications after which fertilizer is added once a month. For ponds that are heavily influenced by spring rains, the fertilization schedule can be delayed to the end of March. Occasionally, a pond will have too much water flow to fertilize. In these cases, the fertilizer will be washed out of the pond and should not be added.

If an established bass and bream pond is fertilized, harvest rates should average twenty-five pounds of bass per acre per year, and as many as 200 pounds of bream per acre per year. Unfertilized, established bass and bream ponds should be harvested at ten pounds of bass per acre per year and 100 pounds of bream per acre per year. Prior to stocking a new bass and bream pond, a manager should consider whether or not they will fertilize the pond each year according to the recommended guidelines. A pond that is to be fertilized should be stocked with 1000 bream per acre (in the winter) and 100 bass per acre (the following June). A pond that is not going to be fertilized should be stocked at 500 bream per acre (in the winter), and 50 bass per acre (the following June).

Fertilizers for ponds fall in three categories, granular, liquid and super soluble powders. Each has application requirements which should be followed to generate expected results. A central key of each type is the prevention of fertilizer from contacting bottom muds where it will be chemically bound and unavailable to the pond. Your county agent can discuss the specifics of each type and help you to determine which option is best for your situation.