

Sea Grant Extension  
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You have worked hard all winter to get your pond ready for a spring and summer of good fishing. Your time and money have been invested in maintaining healthy water quality for your fish and establishing a healthy algal bloom. Unfortunately, even after these efforts, some pond owners will experience fish losses this summer from handling, oxygen-related stress, and disease. Several factors can contribute to a fish loss event in a pond, but there are some steps that can be taken to help minimize the risk.

The first time a pond owner is likely to lose fish is in the week following stocking of the pond. The handling stress involved with capturing, hauling, and stocking fish can be overwhelming for some individual fish. Generally, if less than 10% of the total stocked fish die within the first week of stocking, it is attributed to handling stress. The fish supplier can take steps to reduce the stress of handling including taking fish off feed a day or two before transporting, transporting appropriate densities with supplemental oxygen, adding salt, and moving fish when temperatures are cooler. Pond owners can help by insuring the pond is suitable for fish prior to stocking, including ordering appropriate numbers of fish and maintaining high water quality.

As water temperatures rise, during the spring and summer, the ability of water to hold oxygen is reduced which can lead to fish kills. Oxygen concentrations in ponds are lowest in the early morning hours before sunrise. A recently fed fish requires more

oxygen as a hungry fish; therefore pond owners should feed fish in the mornings after sunrise. If oxygen stress is suspected, reduce or suspend feeding immediately. With the morning sun, algae begin to produce oxygen (photosynthesis) and stop consuming it (respiration). However, supplemental oxygen through aeration is a good idea to help your fish through the night.

A final cause for loss of fish is disease. Some signs that your fish may be sick include loss of appetite, erratic swimming, and lethargic behavior. Diagnosing a fish disease at the pond is often difficult and may require the pond owner to send a sample to a diagnostics lab. However, once an accurate diagnosis is available, treatment options can be made available to the pond owner. A pond owner should never provide medicated feed to fish without first determining if it would be effective.

For additional questions or information, contact P.J. Waters, Auburn University Marine Extension and Research Center, 438-5690.