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So you are interested in digging a pond, or revitalizing a pond that has been neglected for a while. You know that bass and bluegill ponds are a classic, but you are interested in adding another type of fish? Consider adding shell crackers or catfish. Shell cracker (red ear) and/or channel catfish can add additional angling opportunities for your pond, as well as additional menu options following your catch.

Shell cracker, also known as red ear, can be stocked along with blue gill to provide forage for largemouth bass in fertilized ponds. If you decide to stock red ear, they should comprise twenty percent of your bream stocking rate. At one thousand bream per acre, two-hundred can be red ear, with the balance being comprised of bluegill. The red ear generally will stay off shore as compared to the bluegill which tends to stay closer to the shoreline. Both provide excellent angling opportunities and are good to eat.

Channel catfish has become a very popular fish for ponds. With its widening acceptance in restaurants, the channel catfish can be found throughout Alabama. In a fertilized pond that contains bass and bream (bluegill and/or red ear), catfish can be stocked at a rate of fifty to one hundred per acre. For those ponds that are not fertilized by the manager or owner, a rate of twenty-five per acre can be stocked.

For smaller ponds, generally less than one-half acre, catfish are the recommended species. Bass and bream ponds are difficult to maintain when pond size is less than one-half acre. In these cases, channel catfish can be stocked at rates as low as three hundred per acre. Supplemental feeding is needed in these ponds to help the fish grow to a harvestable size. A commercial floating diet, 28% protein, is widely available at most feed and seed stores. Feeding should begin in the spring, and continue through the fall. During the winter, feed can be offered at a lower rate. To avoid over feeding, a manager or owner should not feed more than twenty pounds of feed per acre per day. Over feeding fish can lead to water quality problems, and unnecessary feed expense.

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