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Fall and winter are fast approaching. Pond managers are using this time to prepare their ponds for the coming spring. If your pond's focus is bass and bluegill, but you would like to have access to some catfish, consider a combination of the three. Channel catfish are a very popular food fish, dominating aquaculture in west Alabama, and Mississippi. They are very easy to cook, and have a mild flavor that makes them so popular in a growing number of restaurants.

Channel catfish (4"-6") can be stocked at up to 100 fish per acre in a bass bluegill pond without adversely affecting their production. The key to stocking the catfish with bass is to put them in early such that they attain a size of 8 inches before the bass are added. This will allow the catfish to be large enough to avoid predation by the bass. This head start will allow you to harvest bass, bluegill, and catfish from the same pond, while maintaining a balanced and healthy system. Ponds with an established bass population can be stocked with larger catfish fingerlings, however survival may be lower.

If you are interested in stocking channel catfish and need a source for fingerlings you must look to a commercial hatchery. For sources of channel catfish fingerlings for your pond, you may contact me or your county agent. Delivery costs and fish prices will vary by producer and fish size. Adding a third species to your pond should improve your fishing experience and create some variety on your dinner plate.

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