

A Few Facts On Redear, Bluegill & Sunfish

I n s p i r e d B y N a t u r e

Sunfish

Sunfish are undisputedly one of the most popular fish for ponds and small lakes. Sunfish encompass a wide variety of fish including bluegill, redear sunfish, green sunfish, hybrid bluegill, pumpkinseed, and even largemouth bass. This fact sheet will discuss the two primary prey species, bluegill and redear sunfish. Sunfish are well adapted to pond life and provide a sustained forage base for larger predators. They also offer excellent recreational and table fare opportunities.

When stocking sunfish, or any forage fish for that matter, it is essential to stock a predatory fish (for example Largemouth Bass). In the absence of predators, sunfish will reproduce to such a rate that your pond will become overrun with small, malnourished fish. This situation referred to as "stunting" produces poor fishing conditions and an imbalance in the fish population.

Also, when it comes to stocking any sunfish, it is very important to ensure that you are in fact stocking the sunfish species that you desire. Most sunfish have similar characteristics, sometimes making identification difficult. However, many are quite different in habitat usage and temperament. Therefore, haphazardly stocking sunfish into your pond can create many headaches in the future. Take the green sunfish for example. Superficially, they resemble a bluegill. However, if a sizable population of green sunfish becomes established in your pond, you can usually expect small fish size and very aggressive fish that bite swimmers.

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Bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*)



Bluegill are the most popular and best suited sunfish for fishing ponds. Pure bred bluegill have a very small mouth with an upper jaw that does not typically extend to the front of the eye. Their opercle (gill flap) is flexible and the bluegill have a long, moderately pointed pectoral fin. There is also a dusky spot on the webbing of last three fin rays on dorsal fin. Two bars extend back from the mouth and chin, and the lower end of gill cover is bluish, hence the name bluegill. There are 5-9 double bars on their sides with young bluegill having a few, large spots on their breast. By fall, bluegill will reach 1.0" to 4.0" with adult bluegill reaching sizes of 3.5" -10.0". In regard to habitat, bluegills are most abundant where suspended clays and silts are absent and vegetation present. Their preferred spawning habitats are bottoms consisting of sand, gravel or muck. Bluegills will spawn several times throughout the summer, providing considerable forage for predatory fish.

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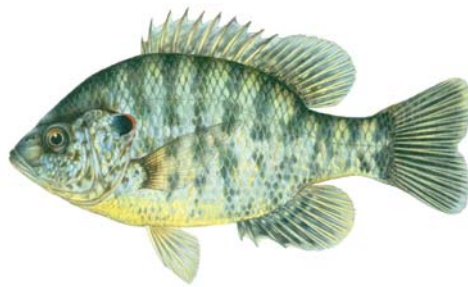


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Redear Sunfish (*Lepomis microlophus*)



Redear Sunfish have proven to be an excellent addition to the fisheries of many ponds and lakes. A relative of the Bluegill, the Redear sunfish is similar in shape and size. Redear are most easily recognized by the red spot on the back side of opercle (gill cover) on males. This spot is orange in females. They also have long pointed pectoral fins and dorsal and anal fins without definite spots. Juveniles can reach 3.0" by fall with adults reaching 4.5" to 9.0".

Differences between bluegill and redear arise when comparing the habitat and feeding requirements of the two. First of all, Redear sunfish are very structure oriented, unlike their Bluegill counterparts who will frequent open waters. Like bluegill, redear sunfish consume small aquatic insects. However, snails and other mollusks comprise a large portion of the Redear's diet. Although both species will inhabit sand and gravel beach areas during their spawning season, Redear sunfish usually reproduce only once per season, reducing the time they will be in the beach area.

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The reduced spawning that is characteristic of the redear also enhances their role in some pond and lake ecosystems. These systems include ponds used primarily for swimming, where fishing is of low priority. However, it should be noted that having redear as the only forage in a pond will not support a very large predator population. To enhance the predator's growth, additional forage such as fathead minnows must be added if a healthy predator population is desired.

Both Bluegill and Redear sunfish can be stocked within the same fishing pond. In fact, these species are able to cross or hybridize with each other. The hybrid of a bluegill and Redear sunfish show excellent hybrid vigor, meaning that the next generation of fish grow faster and are more desirable than the parent species. Hybridization of these species will be more pronounced in ponds with limited water clarity.

Sunfish are the base of most farm pond fisheries. With their tolerance small, shallow waters, as well as their desirability for fishing and consumption, they are a great addition to most any pond. Please contact Inspired by Nature, Inc with further questions or stocking recommendations for your pond.

References:

Trautman, M.B. 1981. The Fishes of Ohio. The Ohio State University Press. 782 pp.

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