

RAISING RAINBOW TROUT IN CAGES

Thoughts of rainbow trout usually turn to cold mountain streams and lakes, but ponds in Tennessee with good water quality will support them in the winter months also. Rainbow trout thrive in good quality water with at least 5 parts per million dissolved oxygen and temperatures from 50 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Since most ponds and lakes in Tennessee have water with these characteristics from November to April, trout can be grown successfully.

Some pond owners stock trout for winter fishing. This practice works fine and provides some outstanding recreation. Stocking in the range of 2,000 - 2,500 per surface acre should be about right. Many of the trout can be harvested with hook and line. All of them will not likely be harvested before the water gets too warm for them to survive in the springtime so plan to do some seining. For complete harvest, it will be necessary to drain the pond.

There may be freshwater prawn producers who will grow some trout as a second aquaculture crop in their prawn ponds. Since most of the prawn ponds are once acre or less in size, they should lend themselves well to trout production. This practice will work particularly well in ponds that have a water supply close by.

Another way to grow rainbow trout in ponds where draining is undesirable is to use cages. This culture method offers assurance of getting all of the trout that are produced back at harvest time. By starting with 6-inch trout fingerlings (about 10 per pound) in early November, they should weigh 12-14 ounces each by harvest time in early April. During this period of 135-140 days, count on at least 100 days when water temperature are ideal for trout growth.

A cage size that would be good for most families is 3 ft. x 4 ft. x 3 ft. deep. Stock 500 rainbow trout (14/ft³) and expect about 320 pounds of dressed fish.

On a commercial scale, four such cages of fish can be grown per acre without taxing the water quality. Expect to harvest about 1,500 pounds per acre.

The trout will require a high quality trout feed fed twice daily. It should be 36-40 protein floating feed with all essential vitamins and minerals. Many feed companies have directions on the feed bags for amounts to be given daily according to fish size and water temperature. As a general rule, they should be fed what they will consume in about 10 minutes. This will be around 3 percent of their body weight per day. Food consumption will go down when the water temperature dips below 50 degrees Fahrenheit. There may be times when the trout may not eat at all when it goes below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Remember, all of the trout should be harvest in April before the water temperature gets above 70 degrees Fahrenheit. This schedule will allow prawn producers time to get their ponds ready for stocking juvenile prawn by late May or early June.

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