



The Fall Bite

Fall is here and DUDE it's time to fish! No, not in the big pond we all enjoy this time of year chasing trout and redfish, but the pond behind your house, in your community, at the farm, hunting club, wherever freshwater is backed up with largemouth bass, bream, or crappies. The cool part about freshwater is it doesn't take much. Only an acre or so is necessary to have some fun.

There's nothing more fun than getting together with your DUDES for some pond fishing in the fall. Once the water temperature drops below 85 degrees, bass go into major grocery-grabbin mode. They've dealt with 90+ degree water for 3-4 months and lets face it DUDES, when its that hot even we don't feel like eating much. But during that hot period the table is being set for a major fall buffet typically consisting of 2-4 bluegill spawns that produce prey that ranges from 1-4 inches in length. And if your pond or lake contains shad, there's 1-3 spawns of shad in the same size range. Spring is right around the corner so mamma bass is bulking up for the spawn and daddy bass is bulking up for mamma bass.

One of my fellow DUDES will usually call me in the fall and say 'Hey, come help me catch some of those trash fish.' Don't you hate it when you get a call like that? Its an inside joke as he is a die-hard crappie and bluegill DUDE and bass are a nuisance to him though he's caught more big bass than anyone I know. Usually he's behind on his bass harvest for the year so we try to hit his lake a few times to bring home some "trash fish" for the skillet. Wait a minute, you said bring some home? Aren't you s'posed to keep all the bream and release all the bass?

Here's a tip: Use the fall bite to keep your fish populations in balance. Catch and release is great for tv and in many public lakes a viable management tool. But it ain't 1965. Few of us count on our pond to produce meals for the next week. Year in and year out 99% of the lakes we survey have too many bass. DUDE if you want to catch healthy, fat bass and more bream, you gotta fire up the fish cooker.

I love fishing topwater and plastic worms. Give me a gold jointed Rapala or Rage shad and a bag of june bug Zooms and I'm good to go. But if you're catching mostly 8-14" bass, just about any lure will do. You need to harvest 20-35 lbs of these squealers per acre annually, depending on your lake's fertility and management plan, to keep your bass fat and your bream growing in numbers that make it fun to drown crickets with the kids. That's a bunch of bass. And fall is the best time to get that bass harvest done before they eat all the bream your big mamas produced this summer.

Don't worry about keeping too many bass. Just keep records of what you pull out. If fellow DUDEs are fishing the same lake, make sure they help with the record keeping. Make it a standing rule. Release the big girls, keep the ones under 15 inches. This is also a perfect time to get kids into the sport of fishing. Since the fish are biting they can learn how to fish a variety of lures. Studies have shown that successful recruitment of kids to our sport requires Dad to get them on some good fish action and allow them to keep what they catch. Keep it light and fun and match their attention spans with the trip. DUDEs we owe it to our kids to pass it on and we live in the greatest location available on earth to do just that!

So take some time this fall to explore a pond or lake (ask permission first!). Don't forget the big bluegills or if you have crappie, man the bite can be awesome. Coupled with some bass fillets and hushpuppies, it doesn't get much better. Try this- take your fillets, cover them in your favorite Pace or similar picante sauce, wrap them in non-stick aluminum foil, and toss them on a hot grill for 15-20 minutes. Good eats DUDE and you're helping your lake in the process.