

**building  
freshwater  
fish  
attractors**

cooperative extension service  
the university of georgia college of agricultural  
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# Building Freshwater Fish Attractors

Adding fish attractors or artificial reefs to attract fish in salt water environments has been extremely successful. The same idea is now being used in freshwater lakes which do not have enough natural cover and structure around which fish orient themselves. Freshwater fish attractors concentrate fish by providing cover, structure, spawning habitat and an attachment surface for many fish food organisms,

## When And Where

Fish attractors should not be installed indiscriminately. They give best results in lakes where brush is scarce. Attractors are not often used in rivers and may not be effective in lakes with excessive cover, such as aquatic weeds. Excessive cover from aquatic weeds or fish attractors can contribute to population imbalance by over protection of small fish. If possible, a fishery biologist should be consulted about need and location of fish attractors.

Fish attractors can be placed in any private waters; however, fish attractors cannot be installed in navigable waters without a permit from the United States Army Corps of Engineers. To obtain a permit, submit a letter of application together with a complete plan including exact location, size and clearance over structure at mean low water level. Attractors in navigable water must be marked with permanent buoys in accordance with the uniform waterways marking system. State, county and municipal authorities should be contacted to insure compliance with local laws.

## Location

There is no ideal size or number of attractors which may be used. As a general guide, do not allow attractors to cover more than 0.25 acres of bottom per 100 surface acres of lake. Some experts have suggested a maximum of three fish attractor sites in lakes of 100 to 1000 acres and one per 500 surface acres in larger lakes.

Sites should be selected carefully. Attractors should be kept away from navigation channels or areas where they will be exposed during low water. They should be placed on hard barren bottom in close proximity to deep water. If attractors must be located in soft mud bottoms or areas subject to siltation, taller units should be used. Cover sites about 10 feet deep are considered good for panfish. Sites located off points at depths of 20 to 35 feet near deep water are considered good for largemouth bass.

## Construction

A number of materials and designs have been used in the construction of fish attractors. Criterion for selection of materials and unit design are cost, durability in water, availability, ease of handling and construction.

### Brush

Brush is usually available but difficult to handle and deteriorates rapidly. Because brush floats, it must be carefully bundled and well anchored. Four successful brush units are:

1. *Rodeheffer square frame unit*- a 9 foot square inner frame with poles protruding beyond frame and an 11 ½ foot square outer frame tied to the protruding poles. Lay 18 inch diameter brush bundles at small end on frame tops away from center. Place bundles as close as possible to form a circular shelter 18 feet in diameter.
2. *May stacked brush unit*-stack brush 5 or 6 feet high on a 5 by 10 foot frame and secure with wire clothesline.
3. *Block-brush unit*-brush bundles weighted with concrete blocks. Distribute units around perimeter of sites 15 yards square (Figure 1).

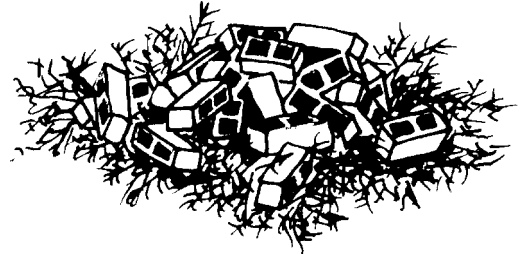
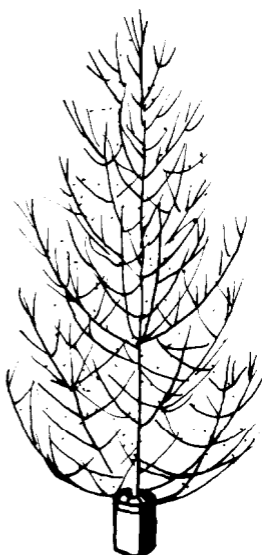


Figure 1

4. *Christmas tree* unit-drill a  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch hole at base of tree and push steel bar into hole. Place tree trunk in a 5 gallon can  $\frac{3}{4}$  filled with concrete and tie units together with polypropylene line when installed (Figure 2).

Figure 2

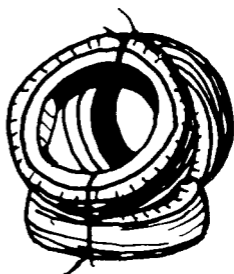


## Tires

Scrap tires are good material. They are available in large numbers at little or no cost and provide an easily assembled unit. Tires do not rust, corrode, leach harmful chemicals or decompose. Tires can be used in many designs; three designs are:

1. *Single tire* unit-place concrete No. 10 filled can between tire side walls and drill at least one  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch hole on the opposite tread to allow air to escape. If cans are not available, concrete can be poured directly into sidewalls. These units can be used alone or used to build more complex units.
2. *Triangle tree* unit-tie three tires together in a triangle with synthetic rope (Figure 3). One or more tires are filled with concrete as described above.

Figure 3



- Pyramid tire unit-build three stacks of three tires tied in bundles. Stacks are lashed together to form a pyramid. Tires in base stacks are filled with concrete as described before. Holes should be drilled in top of all tires but the middle tires of the top stack to assure sinking in an upright position. This unit is heavy and requires special equipment for installation (Figure 4).

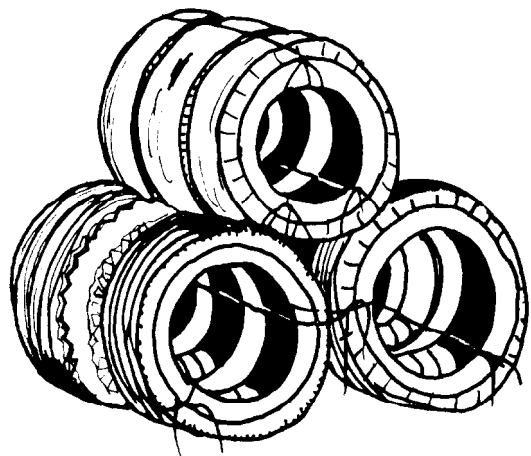


Figure 4

### Stake Beds

Stake beds have been used in shallow water to concentrate crappie. Materials are easily available but costly. Stake beds are more durable than brush and easier to install than tire units. Two methods are:

- Driven stake bed* unit-during winter drawdown drive 150 stakes, 4 to 7 feet long, into a 4 by 8 foot bed in exposed bottom.
- Prefabricated bed* unit-build a 4 by 8 foot wooden frame onto which 150 stakes are nailed. Float bed to selected site and sink with concrete blocks (Figure 5).

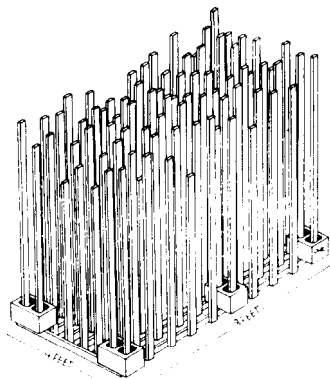


Figure 5

### Car Bodies

Car bodies have been used to create marine artificial reefs, but their value in freshwater structures is questionable. They must be stripped, steam cleaned to remove grease and oil and are a relatively costly material. In addition, they are bulky and require special equipment for installation.

Freshwater fish attractors offer a new management tool for concentrating fish in lakes with insufficient cover. They should be used cautiously and are not desirable in all lakes and ponds. They are not a panacea.

### References

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