



# Fish Attractors in Ponds and Lakes

A Guide to Design and Placement

What is a fish attractor? Is it some new type of high-tech fishing gadget, a hot new lure or is it a scent guaranteed to drive fish wild? Actually, none of these qualify. Fish attractors are simply elements in or near water that provide valuable fish habitat. Cover such as man-made structures, brush piles, crappie beds and aquatic plants all qualify. These elements attract fish by providing them with shade, spawning areas, or spaces to rest or escape from predators. The best attractors also provide food for fish by creating a home for larval aquatic insects.

Small fish come to the cover to eat the insects and bigger fish station themselves nearby to feed on the smaller fish. Several studies show just how important cover is to fish and, in turn, to anglers. At Barkley Lake in Kentucky, fisheries biologist found that crappie, bass, and channel catfish were much more abundant near cover than in the open water. A 1981 survey at Missouri's Long Branch Lake revealed that anglers caught twice as many bass and crappie per hour near cover than in open water. A Virginia study found that largemouth bass spent about 80 percent of their time near the structures we call fish attractors.

Fish attractors occur naturally. For example, a bank tree might topple into the water where its branches set up a food chair that eventually includes fish. Fish attractors can also occur inadvertently, as when a landowner installs a dock in from of his property.

Creating your own fish attractors will both increase the carrying capacity of the waterbody and serve as your own private fishing hotspots. Attractors vary in size, complexity, and the amount of work necessary to build and maintain them. In most cases, your goal will simple be to provide underwater cover which will initiate and support a food chain. Cover can be constructed from a variety of material, such as pallets, pipe, and prefabricated plastics. Research has shown that natural materials like brush and trees are the most economical effective attractors.

## Natural Attractors

### Aquatic Plants

Plants are a natural and necessary component of any healthy pond or lake. They provide cover, food, and nesting sites for fish and other aquatic organisms; oxygenate the water; and help prevent shoreline erosion. Because aquatic plants are necessary for good fishing, they should be managed rather than eliminated.

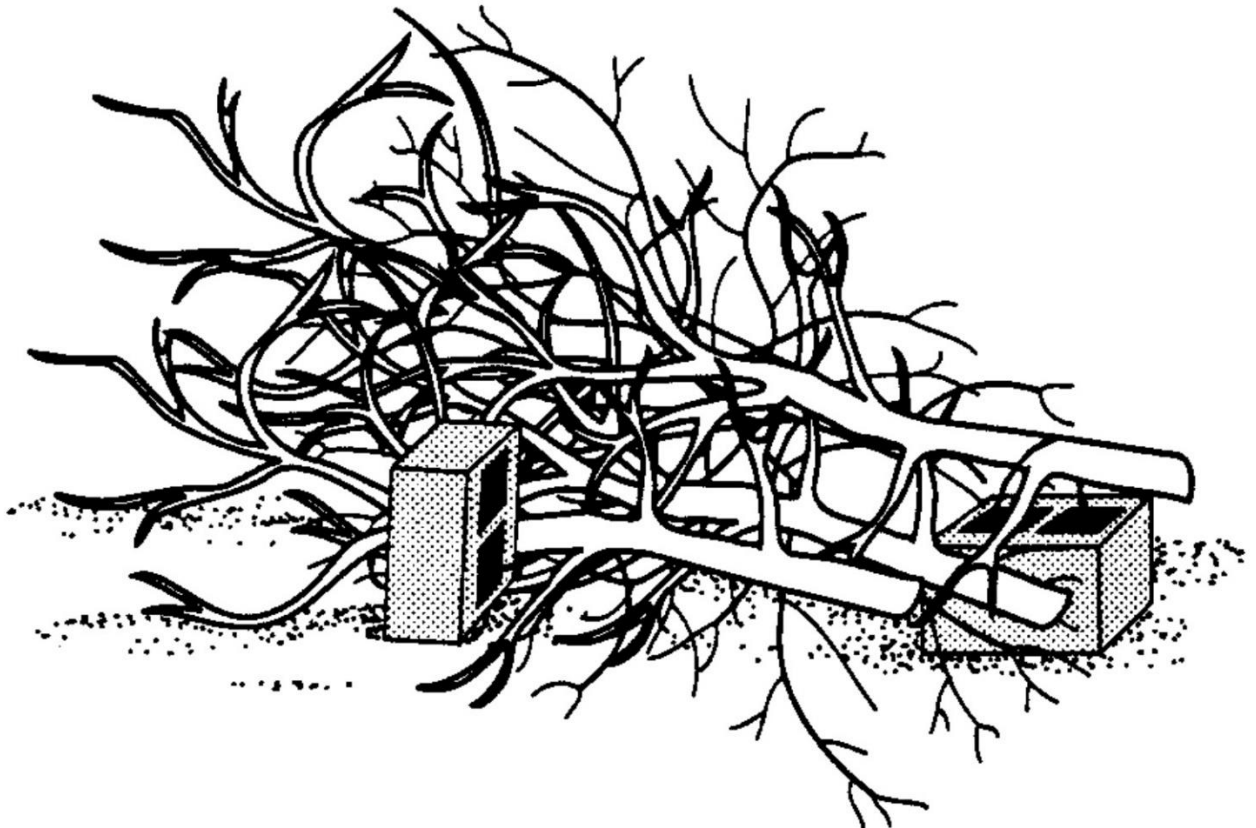
Ideally, 10 to 20 percent of a pond's bottom and surface should have aquatic plants. If your pond or lake lacks adequate aquatic plants, you should consider adding them. Refer to our publication *"How to Establish Aquatic Plants in You Pond"* for more information.

## Brush and Trees

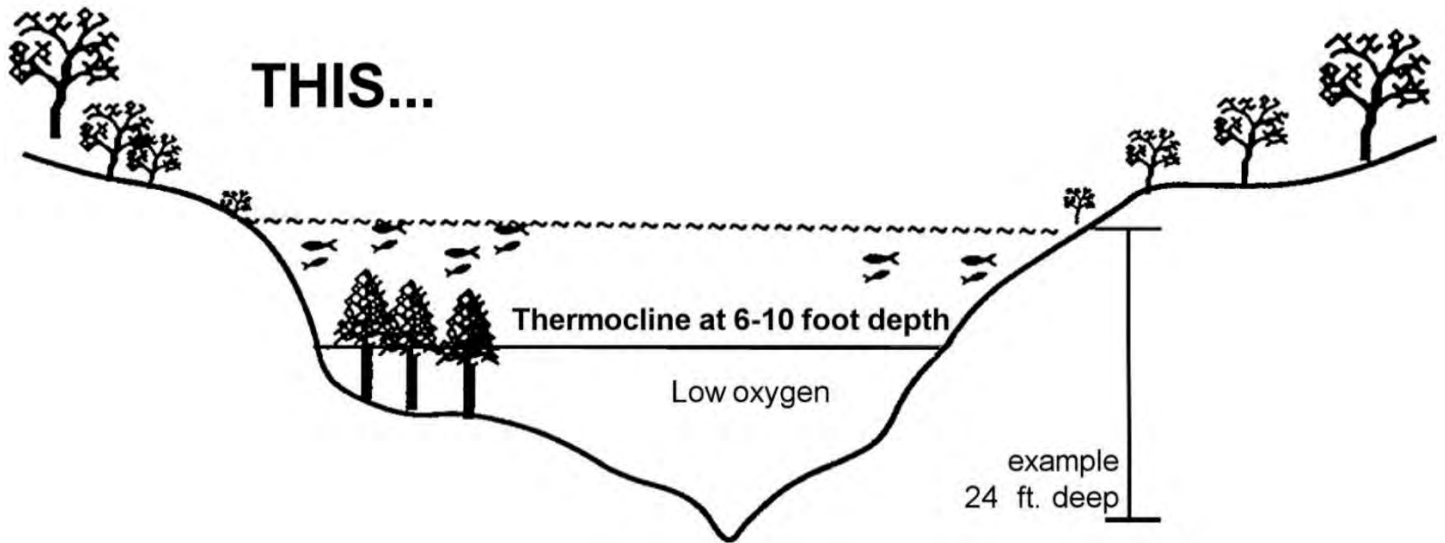
Brush pile materials are usually inexpensive and easily obtained. Almost any type of tree can be used to make attractors, but the best are busy trees such as Osage orange, pin oak, post oak and cedar. Firewood cutting leftovers and Christmas trees are also excellent candidates for brush piles. Trees can be anchored with rocks, concrete blocks, or concrete slabs. Anchors can be tied to the trees using plastic banding, polypropylene rope, or Number 9 wire.

The easiest time to install a fish attractor is while the lake is being built. A bulldozer can quickly build several good attractors by pushing downed trees together during construction. These structures can be anchored in place by pushing dirt over their bases, or by using cable and earth anchors. Timber left standing in the lake's basin creates a natural fish attractor.

For existing lakes and ponds, trees can be towed into place with a boat or placed on the ice during winter to sink in position when the ice melts. This latter technique requires thick, well-established ice. A good rule of thumb is to wait until the ice is at least 18 inches thick. The size of your lake or pond and existing habitat will determine how many brush piles to install. A small pond might need only one big brush pile, while large lakes may require several to noticeably improve fishing.

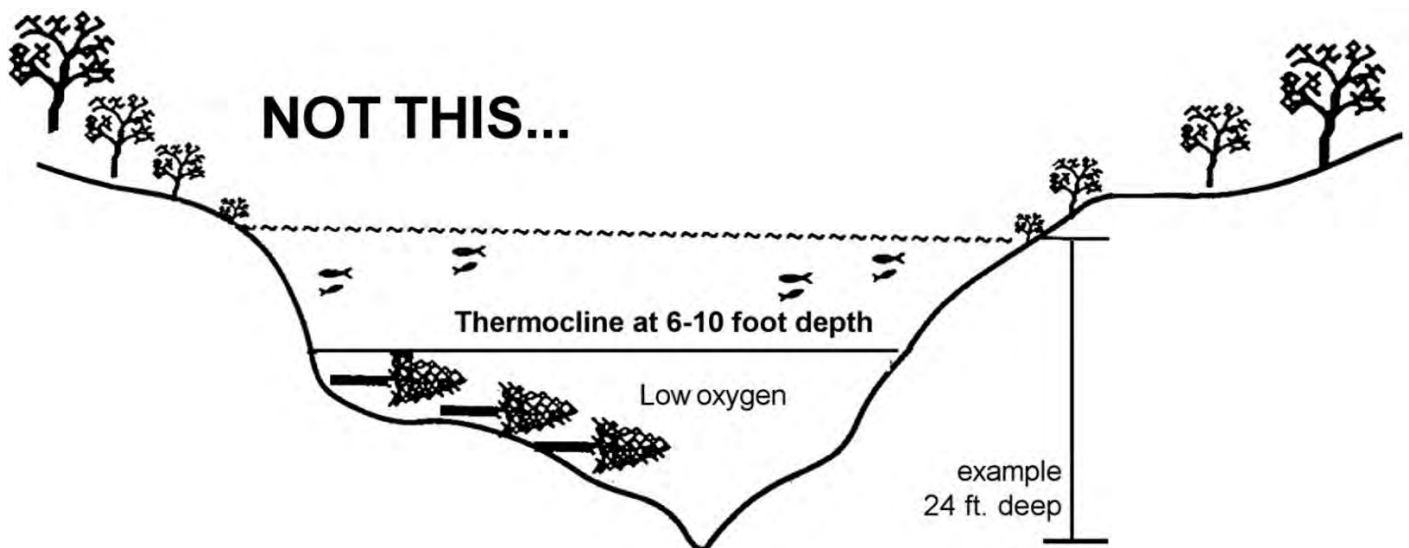


## Placement



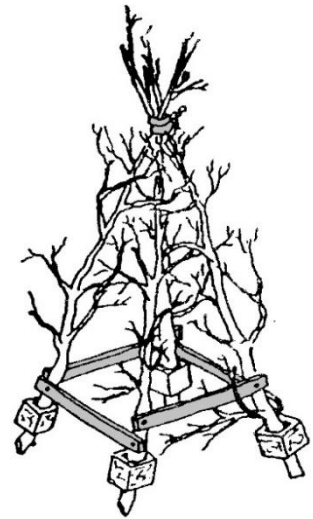
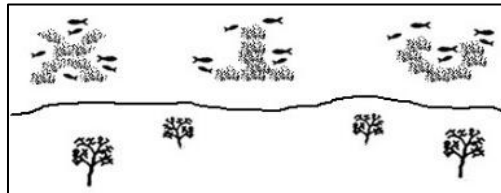
### Note:

Place brush in a vertical position and in water less than 15 feet deep as shown in the above diagram. By using this method, fish will be able to utilize the brush all year long. Using the method shown below, fish will only be able to utilize the brush during the spring and fall turnover.

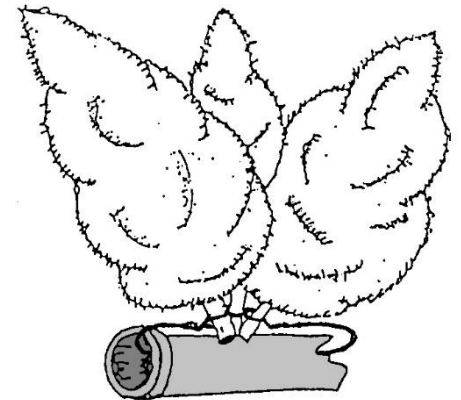


## Guidelines

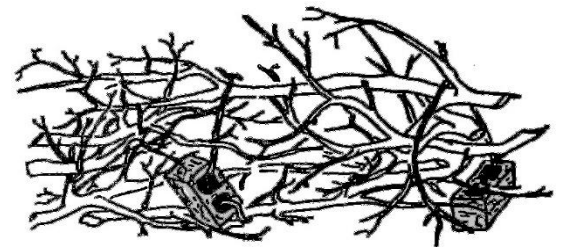
- Three or four trees can provide adequate cover, but generally the larger the brush pile the better.
- Good fish attractors will be about 10 by 15 feet, or larger. Grouping trees to make one large brush pile is more effective than having individual trees spread out over the entire lake.
- Place one fish attractor for every 2 to 3 acres in areas that are most attractive to fish, such as in coves, off points and along the edges of old creek channels and drop-offs. Brush piles in small ponds can be placed around the shoreline or off the dam, as long as you are careful to maintain a safe distance (approximately 100 feet) between the fish attractor and any spillways or overflow pipes. Decaying fish attractor material can do severe damage to these. It's also good idea to place some brush piles within casting distance of bank anglers.
- Don't place fish attractors in the deepest water because dissolved oxygen levels during summer may be too low to support fish life. Place the cover no deeper than 10 to 12 feet. Brush piles won't interfere with boating if sunk 4 to 5 feet below the surface of the water.
- Stack tree limbs or stand trees up on the bottom by placing weight only at the butt end of a tree. A higher profile creates more usable fish cover.
- Arranging larger brush piles in an X, T, or C shape can help concentrate fish. The top of the T and left side of the C should run parallel to shore. The tail ends of the C and T should extend out into deeper water.
- Fell live or dead trees around the shoreline using a hinge cut to hold the trees in position. This provides good overhead cover for fish.
- Place markers on shore or tie markers to the attractors to help you locate them.
- Natural cover decomposes and needs periodic replacement. Softwood trees last about 7 years and some hardwoods can remain up to 30 years.
- Be sure to contact the proper authority before adding cover to your favorite public fishing spot. Public lakes have special regulations that apply.



**Pyramid Structure**



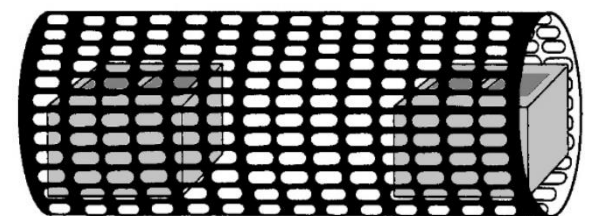
**Evergreen Bundle**



**Brush Bundle**



**Hinge Cut Tree**



**Polypropylene Netting Structure**

For further information about fish habitat structures contact your local MDC office or visit [mdc.mo.gov](http://mdc.mo.gov).



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