

Tilapia

Yes, this is the same fish you purchase in the grocery store. They were introduced to Florida in 1961. They were called Nile Perch and were expected to be a spectacular sport fish that would encourage fishermen to visit our state while solving our aquatic weed problems. (If something sounds too good to be true...)

Needless to say, this did not work out. When was the last time you heard a fisherman say, "I'm going out to catch a bunch of Tilapia." Tilapia now thrive in thousands of south Florida lakes, especially neighborhood ponds.

Some people think Tilapia solve weed problems by eating unwanted plants. While Tilapia can help with algae growth, they are not a cure for all aquatic weed problems. Lake owners need to be careful when introducing exotic fish like Tilapia to their ponds. It is much easier to introduce a new species than it is to remove the species if it becomes a problem.

Tilapia grow well because they survive in poor water quality. Conditions that kill bass and bluegills don't affect Tilapia.

They are aggressive reproducers, breeding three times each year depending on water temperature. They start reproducing at six months old and produce over 500 more fish per year. Two fish in your pond could become a thousand in one year. The fish that was intended to help our lakes has become a pest.

The only reason they don't completely take over more lakes is that they are tropical fish and water temperatures below 65° cause a great deal of stress. Thousands of Tilapia die each year from the cold temperatures in winter. Tilapia can co-exist with native species, but it is an uneasy balance of Bass, Bluegills and Tilapia.

Tilapia will ever 'go away'. They can be helpful for certain weed control situations, but should be considered carefully. It is illegal to possess live Tilapia without a license. Consult with a Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission biologist if you want more information or want to stock these fish in your pond. Their web site offers more information:
http://www.myfwc.com/WILDLIFEHABITATS/Nonnative_FW_BlueTilapia.htm

When Tilapia overpopulate a lake, they often cause erosion problems. They fan the water near the shore creating round "bowls" in the sand. These nests or reproductive sites are about 20 inches in diameter and about seven inches deep. After the fish abandon the nest, soil from the shore collapses into the hole. A few dozen Tilapia nests don't cause problems, but hundreds of fish creating nests two or three times a year adds up to erosion problems.

We frequently remove Tilapia to reduce erosion problems. This helps maintain a reasonable balance between our native fish species and Tilapia.