

Attracting Nesting Smallmouth Bass to your Shoreline

In order to attract nesting bass to your shoreline, you have to know a little about the life history of bass.

Getting bass to spawn successfully is only half the battle. Helping the fry survive is the other challenge. Food and shelter is the name of the game. In late May and early June, male bass congregate in rocky shoreline areas of the lake, vying for clean gravel areas in which to build a nest. The male creates a nest by cleaning away dirt and sediment with his tail. Temperatures between 13 and 20 degrees Celsius are typically required for the initiation of nest-building and spawning behavior.



A male bass guarding its nest

Smallmouth bass usually build their nests beside a large object called an

“initiator”. This is usually a large to medium size rock (0.5 metre (1½’) across or larger) or a large log in approximately one metre (3’) of water on a boulder or gravel bottom.

The male entices a female into the nest and spawning takes place. As the eggs do not mature in the female all at once, the female may spawn two or three times before being spent. The male may entice two or three females into the nest before mating is completed, increasing the genetic diversity of the brood.

The male protects the nest aggressively from the time of its construction, but especially once spawning is completed.

When the eggs hatch four to ten days later, they are clear and remain on the bottom of the nest.



Bass eggs incubating on clean gravel.

A week to ten days later, they start rising off the nest and form black larval balls. Larval bass are especially vulnerable to predators during this “free-swimming” stage.

At about fourteen days, the larvae go through a metamorphosis and become “fry”: their body shape changes, coloring turns light brown to near colorless, and the head enlarges. At this stage, broods become aware of their surroundings, sending them scurrying for cover when a predator approaches. As the fry mature, they wander further and further from the nest. The “ball” of fry that the male is trying to guard becomes less well defined and harder to protect. Eventually, protection becomes impossible and the male returns to deeper water for the summer feeding period.



Bass sac fry resting at the bottom of their nest



Stones around a nest provides good cover for bass fry to escape predators. A nearby large stone or submerged log acts as a good nest “initiator”

If you own shoreline property, you may want to consider providing suitable habitat for smallmouth bass to nest along your shoreline. The instructions on the following page, will demonstrate how to create a bass nest.



A male bass guarding fry (the black spots) in its nest.

1. Select a shoreline site in approximately 1.0 metre (3') of water depth on a rocky or gravel bottom, preferably with an initiator rock or log nearby. Shorelines that are sheltered from strong prevailing winds are best and will help to ensure that nests will not be destroyed by future wave action.
2. **“IMPORTANT”**: Ensure that the nest is not located where it will be subject to disruptive boat traffic. A good rule of thumb is to not build it any further from shore than the furthest extent of docks in the vicinity of your shoreline. This way it will not be a hazard or an obstruction to your neighbours.
3. In approx. one metre of water depth, add or move around existing stones to create a open sided ring (horseshoe shaped) of stones approximately 60 – 70 cm (2 feet) inside diameter and no higher than 30 cm (12”) off the bottom. It should look like a campfire pit, but with one side open. Or move existing stones around so it creates a shallow depression of the same diameter listed above.
4. Add clean, pea sized gravel, dumped to a depth of approx. 6-10 cm (2 to 4”) on the bottom of the created bass nest. The pea gravel creates an ideal substrate for bass spawning, egg incubation and fry rearing. A lower row of stones across the open side of the nest will help to keep the gravel in. *(Note: Pea gravel is delivered in 30 kg bags. Depending on bottom substrate, you should be able to make 2 - 4 nests per bag.)*
5. Enjoy your accomplishment and know that your efforts can help make a difference in protecting and enhancing the fisheries of your local area for many years to come.

For more information on this and other fisheries enhancement, protection and rehabilitation initiatives being undertaken by the “Eastern Georgian Bay Fisheries Stewardship Council” please check out our website at <http://www.helpourfisheries.com>, or to get involved please email the Council at council@helpourfisheries.com

Eastern Georgian Bay Fisheries Stewardship Council - Mission Statement:

“To provide guidance for the protection, enhancement, and utilization of healthy sustainable fish populations, habitats and aquatic ecosystems”

Definition of Environmental Stewardship:

“An ethic in which humans, care for the land and its waters as one part of the natural system. To participate in environmental stewardship is to make a personal commitment to the land and its waters and to sustain and enhance it for generations to come.”



**Eastern Georgian Bay
Fisheries Stewardship Council**

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