Nearly Time for Bluegill - A Panfishing Primer

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Within a few weeks, virtually every area pond, lake, river and stream will begin offering good action for the popular bluegill.

Local anglers are fortunate that most area waters boast a bountiful supply of these prolific species. Landing a bucketful of bragging-size panfish usually requires little more than a trip to your favorite local fishing hole, locating a likely looking spot and presenting one of a variety of popular baits.

It is a rare day when a few of these fish cannot be enticed by a piece of worm or a tiny artificial lure. The voracious panfish are almost always willing to help in your efforts to bring home enough tasty filets to feed the entire family.
Small when compared to other species, a half pounder is considered a quality catch. Fish in the three-quarters-pound category are fairly common. Panfish weighing in excess of one pound will open the eyes of almost any fishing enthusiast.

Most panfish anglers prefer to concentrate their fishing efforts to the months during and following the spawn. During these times, panfish are caught quite easily and in large numbers.

But, pre-spawn panfish are no different. Using the right techniques, tackle and baits, it is fairly simple to boat a stringer full of quality fish.

To the delight of anglers, panfish tend to be a sociable lot. They are often found in groups of 20 or more fish. Depending upon the clarity and depth of a particular fishing hole, panfish are most often found in relatively shallow water.

During the spawn, they can be located near clusters of nests in one to six feet of water. In most areas, spawning activity peaks during May or early June and continues to a lesser degree throughout the summer months. Though most panfish, like bluegill, prefer to nest on a harder bottom of gravel, they will also use one of mud, silt or sand.

When not nesting, panfish will usually be found in deeper water adjacent to or near the traditional nesting areas. During the morning and evening hours, they will often move into the shallows to feed on insects, small fish o other aquatic organisms. Though the

assortment of foods is less varied during the pre-spawn months, the same generally holds true.

Areas near boat docks or fallen trees are terrific midday spots to search for pre-spawn panfish. Shallow water areas, especially those containing aquatic vegetation, are best during the morning and evening hours.

When it comes to baits, almost every panfish angler I know has a particular preference. Some anglers like to keep things simple using a small piece of a garden worm or nightcrawler. However, crickets, meal worms, wax worms and a small piece of shrimp are all equally effective panfish baits.

Many anglers also enjoy excellent success tempting early season panfish to the hook with a variety of small artificial baits. Tiny jigs ranging in size from 1/32 to 1/16 ounce also yield good catches of panfish each spring.

But, no matter what type of tackle you use - spinning, fly fishing or even a simple cane pole - the secret to panfishing success is to scale everything down a size or two. Light lines, small hooks and tiny bobbers are standard tools among most experienced anglers.

Cane poles rigged with a quality four to six-pound-test monofilament line account for a large number of panfish each year. Small hooks, size eight or ten, work particularly well under most conditions. Bobbers should be just large enough to suspend the bait and tiny sinker off the bottom.

While the panfish bite is already very good, some of the best action still lies ahead. Anglers can expect to see even better action all the way into the month of May.