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To: Rains County Leader

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During late spring and early summer pond owners started seeing an abundance of vegetative growth in their ponds. In most instances, the aquatic plants are beneficial. They help filter the water and indicate that the pond is healthy and fish-friendly. But when growth interferes with recreation, irrigation or livestock watering, it's time for action.

The key to controlling aquatic vegetation is proper weed identification. Guessing can be expensive. Aquatic plants come in all sizes and shapes but generally fall into one of four categories: algae (often called "scum"), submerged plants (often called "moss"), floating plants, and emerged plants, plants rooted in the bottom of the pond that grow above the water.

Fresh samples may be submitted to the County Extension Office for identification and control recommendations. However, it is best to call ahead of time to make sure that I am in the office. Pond owners with Internet access can visit Extension's Website called "Aquaplant," the site provides photos, sketches, descriptions and control options for more than 50 common weed species. In addition, labels for various herbicides can be downloaded to help determine the best course of action. The Website address is <http://aquaplant.tamu.edu/>.

Pond owners have three options to control most plant species: chemical, biological and mechanical. Chemical and biological methods can be very effective if done right and at the right time.

Chemical control involves the use of one or more approved herbicides to control targeted species. As with the use of any pesticide, pond owners should closely follow label directions. Severely infested ponds should be treated in sections with a week resting period between treatments. Do not treat more than 25 percent of the surface area during a summertime treatment; too much decaying vegetation over too short of a time may result in oxygen depletion.

The most common type of biological control is the use of triploid grass carp. When stocked at the proper density, grass carp will eat some species of plants and

mosses. By state law, however, pond owners must buy a permit through Texas Parks and Wildlife before purchasing grass carp. They may only be purchased from a fish farm holding an exotic species permit. To find out more on the triploid grass carp go to <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fish/infish/ponds/>

Tilapia, a fish species native to southern Asia, has also been used to selectively control filamentous and other species of algae. Tilapia can be purchased at many East Texas fish farms.

Mechanical control involves the use of weed harvesters, seines or hand removal. This technique is usually of limited value in typical farm ponds. Mechanical control will most likely have to be done each year.

When visiting with pond owners many times I get the same response “I’ve tried everything and nothing works.” There are many reasons why aquatic weed control is a painful process. The main reasons consist of incorrect identification of the target species, inaccurate calculation of the area or volume of the site to be treated, and improper application of the control technique.

Don't guess at what you're trying to control. Get a positive identification of weed species, and then assess your options as to whether to go with chemical, biological or mechanical techniques.

Lastly, I must stress that the control methods that I am talking about pertain to pond management. Many of our readers live around the shoreline of Lake Fork and Lake Tawakoni. In order for you to do any type of weed management program, you must contact the Sabine River Authority to discuss management options and to obtain permits.