

Bluegill (*Lepomis macrochirus*)

Do they have any other names?

They are sometimes called bream, brim, pond perch, or various other common names depending on where you are in the United States.

Why are they called bluegill?

The name bluegill comes from the bluish region on the cheek and gill cover (opercle).

What do they look like?

Bluegill are a type of sunfish. They have a deep, slab-sided (tall and flat) fish with a small mouth. Color varies with the age and sex of the fish. Water color can also affect the color of a bluegill but they are generally dark olive-green along the back and lighter on the sides.

The dorsal fin (fin on the top of the back) is continuous, with the first part being spiny and the back being soft. They have five to nine vertical bars on each side. See diagram below.

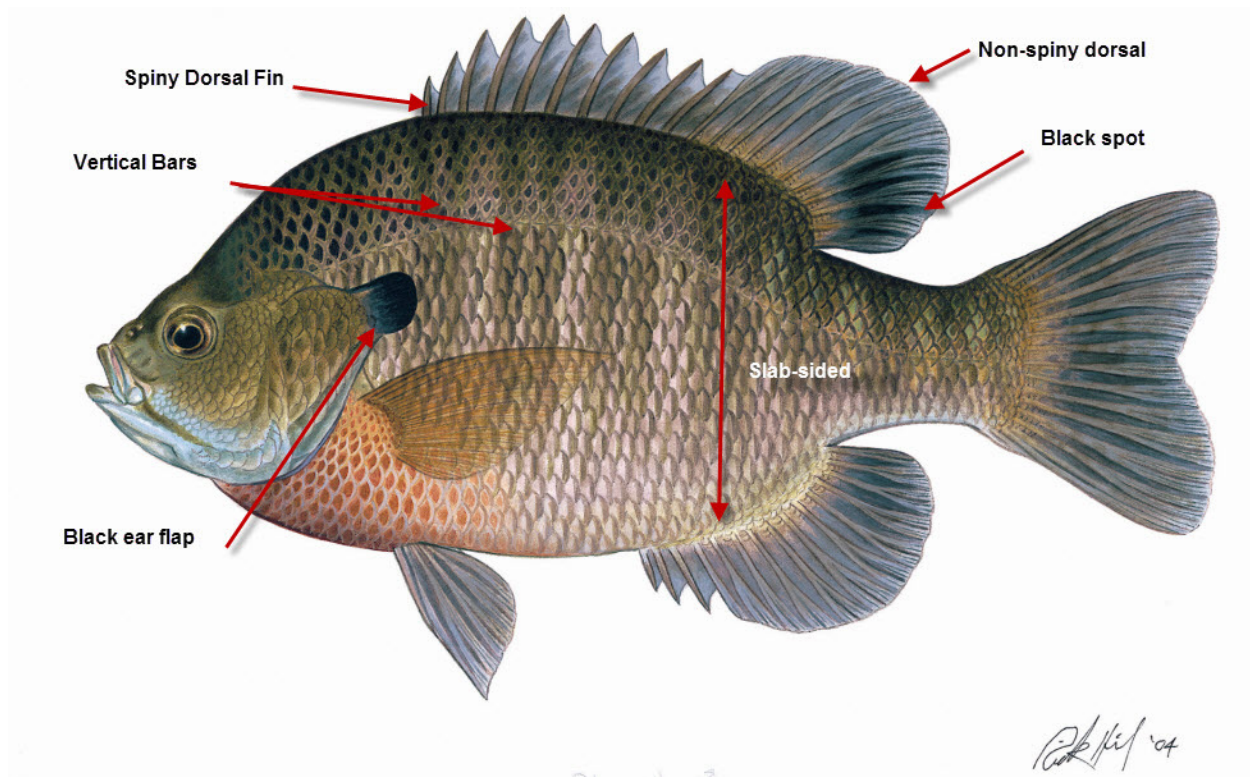


Photo credit: Rick Hill, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources

Where do they live in Indiana?

Bluegill are found almost everywhere in Indiana from farm ponds to streams. They are most abundant in lakes and man-made impoundments but can also be found in deep, quiet pools of streams.

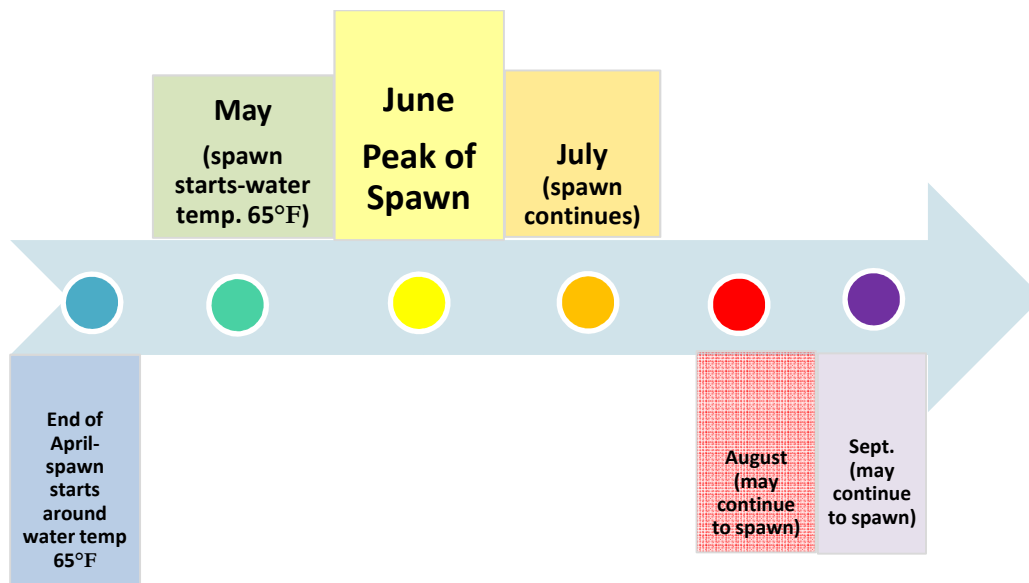


What kind of habitat do they need?

Bluegill are often found in lakes and slow-moving streams. They prefer weed beds for cover. This allows them to hide from predators and find aquatic insects to eat.

How do they reproduce?

Bluegills begin nesting in the spring after the water temperature has reached about 65 °F.



Nests are built by the males in water from one to six feet deep. Almost any type of bottom may be used for nesting but gravel is preferred. The male constructs the nest by fanning away the sediment with his tail to form a shallow depression in the bottom, often known as a bluegill bed. Bluegills usually bed in colonies, with many nests adjacent to each other in a small area.

A female is admitted into the nest once she is ready to lay eggs. The eggs are fertilized by the male as they are deposited onto the floor of the nest. The eggs hatch in three to four days depending on water temperature. After hatching, the fry remain in or near the nest for several days before dispersing and leaving the protective influence of the guardian male.

How old are they when they reproduce?

Most bluegills start to spawn at two years old, although some start as early as their first year of life. The older the female gets the more eggs she will produce. A four year old female produces about 20,000 eggs.

How long do they live?

Bluegill usually live from 4 to 6 years of age but can reach up to 8 to 11 years of age in captivity.

How fast do they grow in Indiana?

That depends on where you are in Indiana. Bluegill grow faster in the southern half of the state than the northern half. This is due to a longer growing season in the south (milder climate). They usually reach six inches by age four and they usually live up to 6 years of age.

Other factors can affect bluegill growth, such as number of bluegill in the lake or pond and the amount of food available, to name a few.

What do they eat?

Bluegills mostly feed on insects both aquatic and terrestrial. They also eat snails, small crayfish, zooplankton (microscopic animals), other fish and fish eggs. Bluegill are most actively feeding at dawn and dusk when they move into the shallows. Feeding is primarily by sight. Bluegill fry (bluegill just hatched from the egg) feed primarily on zooplankton. Algae and other vegetation may be eaten when animal food is scarce.

What eats them?

Many animals, both terrestrial and aquatic, use bluegill as a food source. Largemouth bass are the most common predator for bluegill but other fish such as walleye, muskellunge, striped bass, white bass, etc. will eat bluegill. Terrestrial predators include the great blue heron, kingfishers, raccoons, and humans, to name a few.

Are they safe to eat?

Bluegill are one of the tastiest fish you can find in Indiana but you may be wondering if they're safe to eat. Wild caught fish are just as healthy for you as most commercially bought fish and in many cases are healthier. You have probably heard about the fish consumption advisories and wonder if any Indiana fish are safe to eat. *The fish consumption advisories that are posted are based on a model that people are consuming 8 oz. of fish on 225 days each year over 70 years.* Most people do not eat fish anywhere close to that amount. Bluegill are one of the "safest" fish to eat in Indiana as they are small and less fatty.

However, any meat you consume will have some risk associated with it. If you are in a high risk



Photo credit: Indiana DNR

group such as a pregnant woman or a child please consult the fish consumption advisory at: www.in.gov/isdh/23650.htm . You can also see which waterbody has advisories on it (most lakes and reservoirs are lower risk than rivers and streams).

How do I fish for them?

Bluegill put up a vigorous fight and are exciting to catch on light tackle. It is also one of the easiest fish for beginners as they are located virtually everywhere and can be brought in on children's fishing poles. Fishing from a fixed location with worms, crickets, or insect larvae (bee moths, spikes, mousies, wigglers) is a very popular and effective method of catching bluegills. At certain times of the year, such as when aquatic insects are emerging or bluegill are spawning, fly fishing with wet flies, dry flies, or poppers is also very effective. Since they have small mouths, the angler should use small hooks (size 8, 10, or even smaller) to catch bluegills. Many people also ice fish for bluegill.



Photo credit: Indiana DNR

How is Indiana managing bluegill?

Bluegill have been managed in the state for the last 100 years or so. Bluegill reproduce prolifically and can easily overpopulate a lake. Therefore, management strategies focus on increasing predation on these fish. This is done by changing largemouth bass regulations, lake drawdowns, and aquatic vegetation control (to increase visibility of bluegill to predators). Fisheries biologist evaluate data collected during fisheries surveys to determine the type of management a specific body of water needs for good bluegill fishing. Fisheries research and management reports can be found at: fishing.IN.gov/3352.htm