

## Why are We Harvesting Tilapia to Remove Them from Our Lakes?

Tilapia are invasive to Florida and have become abundant in our lakes. Tilapia have more than one breeding cycle in a year and are mouth brooders (meaning they carry the eggs in their mouths to protect them from predators and release them to the water upon hatching). The result is a high fecundity and minimal mortality in the egg and larval stage. These fish become sexually active within 6 months, so reproduction is high. Tilapia can change gender depending on conditions, thus adding to the complexity of controlling fish populations. You may have seen the nests of the Tilapia in the shorezone area of each lake, which look like scoured, shallow pits.

*Why do we want to reduce the Tilapia population in our lakes?*

Tilapia become overwhelmingly abundant and during conditions of low oxygen will undergo a major die-off or fish kill resulting in noxious odors, increased organics in our water all of which induces substantial bacteria growth and poor water quality conditions. Tilapia are vegetarians and are not caught by traditional angling methods. If a fisherman catches a Tilapia, it is by snagging. Therefore, Tilapia are best caught by nets.

*Who is harvesting the Tilapia for Heritage Oaks?*

A couple of outside Tilapia Collection companies have been contacted by Heritage Oaks to periodically come to our lakes and collect as many Tilapia as they can. At NO COST to Heritage Oaks, these professional fishermen will collect 600 to 800 lbs. of Tilapia for each day they are here. These companies make their money by selling the Tilapia to food production operations that prepare feed for alligator farms and other wildlife. So, for Heritage Oaks this is a win-win situation by not having to pay for Tilapia removal and being able to diminish the Tilapia population. You may see the pram/boat of the fishermen in one or another lake at times, or perhaps someone on the bank with a casting net, so thank them when you can for doing a good service to Heritage Oaks.

