

TO SPAWN OR NOT TO SPAWN...THAT IS THE QUESTION!

Many people ask...How do I get my fish to have babies?

... or...Why don't my fish spawn in my pond?

...or...How can I prevent my fish from laying eggs?

...or...Where did all those fish come from?...

We will look into this subject and explore the many different options to consider, along with the pros and cons. Growing out your own koi can be very exciting, seeing them grow and develop. Knowing your limitations as well as your pond's will help you make the proper choices of whether or not to encourage a spawn or to begin making preparations to handle the additional fish.

In order to have spawning occur, you have to have male and female fish of age to reproduce. How do you tell the difference? Feel and look at the pec fins. Male pecs are usually pointed and the females are more rounded. Also, the leading ray on a male koi will be rough. The gill plates on a male will feel like sandpaper during spawning season. Body confirmation can be an indicator. Males are typically more slender and the females look rounder. You

can also turn the fish over to try and milk the males through the vent, which can appear different on males and females. How can you determine sexual maturity? Usually this occurs around three years of age.

Your pond needs to have places for the fry to hatch in safety after the eggs have been pushed out of the females and fertilized by the males. This is rocks, nooks and crannies in your pond and algae and plants that can provide cover for the babies. If you have a concrete or liner pond without gravel, rocks and plants, the chances of a spawn are very limited. Usually, a pond with healthy fish will allow eggs to develop and hatch. If your fish are stressed from poor water quality or improper nutrition, your chances are reduced. There are also spawning brushes and mops that can be placed in the pond to replicate natural habitat.

Spawning normally occurs in the spring and can continue through the summer, especially when there has been a significant change in water temperature. It can also happen from a sudden storm, doing a water change or even by adding a new female fish to your pond. It

frequently will happen very early in the morning. You will see a foamy quality to your water and there will be a pungent odor. You may also find plants uprooted or overturned in your pond. If you are there to witness it, you will see the males following the females and pushing her against the sides of the pond and against rocks to force her to release the eggs. The males then fertilize the eggs outside of the female.

You will want to do a water change after spawning occurs as the ammonia may spike and PH can drop. Have ClorAmX, an ammonia binder that also treats for chlorine and chloramines, and baking soda on hand to help offset these changes, along with filtered water. If you do not want koi babies, you can disturb the spawning areas by brushing off the rocks and removing any string algae or debris that have eggs on them. They will be massed in areas and be round and translucent.

Those having show koi usually have a pond that is without these spawning requirements, as they do not want their fish to reproduce. The spawning activity can be very violent and can cause damage to the prized

female koi. Most show hobbyists do not have male koi in the same pond with their female koi. They either have a separate male pond or re-home those fish that are found to be males. That is one reason many fish are purchased as nisai, or two-year-old koi, as the sex can be more easily distinguished by then. Also, if there aren't spawning areas in the show pond and males are present, the females can become egg-bound, which could result in death of the female. If this happens, she would need to be spawned through natural or artificial means. Most hobbyists do not experience this problem as outside ponds go through the winter season where females will absorb any eggs with the fasting.

For those wanting to grow out fry, you need to have a proper feeding regimen for your adult koi, especially through the late summer and early fall. They will need high quality nutrition going into the winter so that they can produce and fertilize eggs in the spring, as you will just start to feed again around the spawning time.

Once the koi have spawned you may lose eggs to frogs and the koi in the pond. When the eggs have hatched,

which will occur in 2-3 days depending on the water temperature, they can still be eaten by frogs, but they will not be eaten by the larger koi. If you keep the babies in the pond, you can provide infusoria at first, which is a small microorganism, then softened koi food or a mash, but there will be adequate natural food in the pond. You should have a pond of adequate size, along with enough filtration to handle an ever-increasing bio load. Some hobbyists pull the small fish and place in a separate vat. This will require space and extra time maintaining additional filter systems. One drawback with this is that some of the larger hatchlings, called tobies, can eat the smaller fry. Vat size will need to increase with the growth of your babies or they will need to be put back in your pond or re-homed.

Once you have your babies growing, they will become tosai, which are one-year-old koi. They have been increasing up to 2 inches a month in a proper environment. You can more easily tell the pattern at this time. You may have lots of dark or light babies, as the breeding process in your pond cannot be controlled like they do in Japan or on a koi farm, where the parent koi are selected in advance to replicate desirable

characteristics. The spawning process is done by artificial means. The females are then stripped of the eggs and placed in separate tanks. In Japan, only a very small % of a spawn will be worth keeping to maturity. They do several cullings over the course of the first year, which eliminates the lesser quality koi. You will find it very hard to decide to cull your own koi babies!

So now the question of what to do with all those babies will need to be answered. They have grown into larger and larger koi and will mature and start spawning themselves. You will need to feed more food, more often. You will need to have re-homing options available to keep your pond under control and not have water quality issues that will compromise your older koi. You also need to have a manageable pond and filter maintenance routine for yourself. After all, this is a fun hobby and we want time to relax and enjoy our ponds.

Do more research on this subject, ask questions of other hobbyists and make the best choices for your situation. Good luck!