

YOU'RE IN THE MAIN STREAM  
by Joe Pell, Williamsburg, Ohio

Let's try to debunk the idea that our native wildlings are picky wimps hardly worth our notice. Look at how they live in the wild. In the Midwest, the water temperatures will go from near freezing to the middle 80s. Every good rain can change the pH of their water and dump silt and farm chemicals on their happy homes.

Natives are tough. One must admire the punishment they can take. But remember you can break an anvil if you try hard enough.

Now for a horror story. The first week of October 1991 marked the beginning of my native-fish collection. It hadn't rained for weeks and the creek near our house was reduced to stagnant pools. To make it worse, tree leaves were choking the pools, and the tannin turned the water black. The bottom line was, the water looked and smelled like something from a septic tank. Well, my do-gooder instinct kicked in, and I took my boys' seine and tried to collect all the fish I could before they all went belly-up. I didn't want to weed the garden, so this was an interesting diversion. At first I was just going to put them in a much bigger stretch of water. Then as the seine was emptied, each time into a five-gallon bucket, I started to ask myself, "What are these things?" I was hooked. So many kinds, and I didn't buy them from a fish store. Hey, this was neat--high adventure for me--and it was more fun than pulling weeds.

I spent over an hour slouching around in water as warm as someone's bath, no chills on my ankles or feet. Some of the small fish went through the weave of the net, some hid under rocks. I saved all I could. I stopped counting after 200 fish. The bucket was densely packed with them. Well, the question was, "You got 'em, now what?" The only thing available was a small garden pool, green as pea soup, and in they all went. Some were sorted out to keep. The rest made it back to the creek. Believe it or not, only four fish died during the ordeal. The rest are still swimming around in my tanks after seven months.

After investing in a new fish library, I found my collection contains Rosefin Shiners (Notropis ardens), Creek Chubs (Semotilus atromaculatus), Suckermouth Minnows (Phenacobius mirabilis), Striped Shiners (Notropis [Luxilus] chrysocephalus), and Bluegills (Lepomis macrochira).

I feel good. Not only did I save some fish, but I helped save the economy. After all, I had to buy all those new tanks and all that fish food. Maybe we should all take a look at what's in our own back yard. Although some of our natives are plain janes, some are real jewels, and most are built Ford-tough. Tropical fish are great, but I say go native. You can have the thrill of the hunt and challenge of "What is it?" In the aquarium, time and time again, you will learn new things as our natives interact. So be patriotic. Look for the label that says, "Made in America."

###