

TWO ECONOMICAL FOOD SOURCES

by Doug Carpenter, Lexington, Kentucky

I have two main sources for my variety of sunfish, darters, catfish, and minnows. Both sources are available in large quantities and at very little expense.

The first is black-fly larva. In central Kentucky, many of the small to medium-sized limestone creeks are egg-laying waters for the black-fly. Each year, in late March or early April, I go to one of these creeks and collect two or three quarts of larvae to freeze. This is more than enough to last me until the next year.

The green-black larvae will be in masses resembling moss, firmly attached to the tops of rocks in the fastest-moving shallow riffles of the stream. Generally the water will be less than six inches deep. These larvae will grow to a length of three-eighths of an inch before changing to a pupal stage and eventually to a fly. The density of the larvae will be approximately thirty per square inch, and it is not uncommon for a medium-sized rock to anchor several hundred.

In order to collect the larvae, I use an old spoon to scrape them off of the rocks and into a bucket. Generally the tops of these rocks are so clean that there won't be too much dirt or algae. Later I will transfer the larvae to smaller containers to freeze.

My second food source is the common mealworm, available in any bait store (and many pet stores). Mealworms are very easy to raise, and can even be left unattended for several months. Their life cycle takes them from an egg to a worm to a pupa to a beetle that dies after laying eggs.

Mealworms can be grown in practically any container as long as they are in a cool, dry environment. The surface area of the container will determine your population limits. I use an old cracked aquarium. Neither the beetles or the worms can climb the glass, but you still need to keep the tank covered to keep the beetles from flying out.

The worms will live in and eat most any crushed-corn chicken food available from farm-supply stores. Add more chicken food as the lumps of corn are turned into a dust-like waste product.

I leave a section of newspaper lying on top of the food for three reasons. First, it provides the worms shelter from bright lights; second, you can gather them more easily from the paper than from the food base; and third, you can water the paper to provide them a drink without turning their food to mush. They will also eat just about any meat or vegetable, but watch out for odors.

Obtain a quantity of worms to get your colony started. Let them get established before using them for fish food. Several varieties of mealworms are available; mine grow to about one inch.

They are most useful in feeding the larger fish such as sunfish and catfish. The smaller worms will usually float, and therefore never get down to darters; however, when torn in half they can appeal to more sizes of fish. At certain times of the year, your colony will consist of only beetles. I usually freeze enough of the worms to get me through this part of their cycle.