K-STATE Research and Extension | Wildcat District

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Blue-green Algae

While all pond weeds and algae can become a nuisance and start to overtake a pond, requiring control, one type of algae is of particular concern, and that is Blue-green algae. Blue-green algae can occur in a pond due to runoff that carries nitrogen or phosphorus into the pond. When the temperature reaches 75 degrees or higher, the algae can grow and bloom. A period of hot, sunny days with little wind, following increased runoff from rain, also increases the likelihood of blue-green algae blooms.

While filamentous algae (green algae) are very common on farm ponds and are not harmful to animals, blue-green algae include many species of photosynthetic cyanobacteria that live in the water and produce toxins that are poisonous to animals. Toxins produced by harmful blooms of blue-green algae are stored in cyanobacteria until they die, and as the cyanobacteria decompose, the toxins are released into the water. Because these toxins are poisonous to animals, it is important to monitor your pond for signs of Blue-green algae and not allow animals access to the pond if Blue-green algae are suspected.

When a pond has a harmful bloom of blue-green algae, the water will have a scum that is most commonly bright green or blue/green, as the name suggests, but can vary in color from blue-green to gray and even red, orange, or brown. The scum will often look like spilled paint, and the water of a pond will often smell bad. Blue-green algae blooms are typically the worst in areas of the pond where water is stagnant, such as a cove or inlet. Ponds that do not have much water movement and do not have much shade are more likely to produce harmful blooms of blue-green algae due to the amount of sunlight that is able to pass through the water's surface. If signs of Blue-green algae are noticed in a pond, animals should not be allowed access to the pond, and water samples should be collected and sent to the Kansas State Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory for testing. Until the water is tested and confirmed safe, animals should be kept away from the pond. Two weeks after the algae bloom starts is the average time it takes to remove the toxin. However, a blue-green algae bloom can last from days to months, depending on the weather conditions. During this time, animals should be kept away from the pond, and the water should be retested before allowing them access again to ensure there are no toxins present.

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