

Tilapia

- Blackchin tilapia: *Sarotherodon melanotheron*
- Spotted tilapia: *Tilapia mariae*
- Blue tilapia: *Oreochromis aureus*
- Mozambique tilapia: *Oreochromis mossambicus*

Order: Perciformes

Family: Cichlidae

Description: Females and non-breeding males are generally silver colored with black dorsal blotches. Breeding males have a distinct black coloration with white on the lower part of the head and red on the margin of the dorsal and caudal fins. The Mozambique tilapia has 14-20 gill rakers, while Blue tilapia can be distinguished by its higher gill raker count (18-26) in the lower branch of the gill arch. Blackchin tilapia can be distinguished by the black coloration on the underside of the chin and the gold coloration on the operculum. The dorsal fin of spotted tilapia has 16 spines.

Special Features:

- **Adaptations** – They quickly grow accustomed to new habitats, and their resistance is absolutely incredible. Because of their ability to adapt to different habitats and, above all, their food value, tilapia have been introduced into many areas both purposefully and accidentally.
- **Size** - Tilapia can reach up to 18 inches in length and weigh up to 1 pound.

Similar Species: The common name “tilapia” refers to several genera of fishes of the Family Cichlidae, Order Perciformes, originating in Africa and Asia.

Range and Habitat: Native to Africa and Asia, tilapia are found in lakes, ponds, rivers, streams and canals throughout the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world.

Reproduction:

Some species such as the Mozambique tilapia are mouth brooders. Tilapia will excavate a nest on gravel and defend the site against predators. As with many cichlid species, both parents protect the nest and young. Blue and Mozambique tilapia may become quite aggressive and will chase trespassers 20 or 30 feet from the nest before returning. During breeding season, tilapia build nests in the shallow areas along shorelines. Spawning begins when water temperatures reach 20° C (68°F).

Notes:

- **Aquaculture** – Tilapia are one of the major groups of farm-raised fish in the world.
- **Consumption** - Tilapia farming and consumption are rapidly increasing in the US. In fact, in every year since 1995, retail sales of tilapia surpassed those of trout.
- **Fisheries Impacts** - In Everglades National Park, blue tilapia compete with largemouth bass for nesting sites. Since the largemouth bass fishery represents over \$50 million annually to the state economy, state officials take this competition seriously.
- **Ecological Effects** - Tilapia are not generally considered predatory, however in large numbers they are capable of drastically altering habitat and competing for resources. They are capable of reproducing under a wide range of conditions and are known to reach “plague proportions” in some areas.
- **Feeding** – Tilapia at all sizes feed primarily on phytoplankton and zooplankton, as well as some invertebrates.
- **Growth Rate** - Tilapia grow fast and may reach sexual maturity at 6 months. Given this fecundity, and their adaptability, it is not surprising that tilapia are abundant.