

Music

This is Bellingham Technical College and a Fisheries Tech Tip.

I'm Earl Steele – Are you ready to learn and do it?

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As people walked towards the pond, they could hear the ring of an aluminum baseball bat. Where is the ball game, they wondered. It wasn't a ballgame at all, it was the fisheries students spawning salmon at the Whatcom Creek Hatchery.

Salmon die after they spawn, so they can be killed before spawning them. The fish are killed and the milt and sperm are taken from the fish and the eggs are fertilized at the hatchery to produce future salmon runs.

The first step is to check the female salmon for ripeness. The fish is held and light pressure is applied below the pectoral fins as the tail is lowered. If a steady stream of eggs flows out of the fish, she is ripe. If eggs do not flow, the fish is green and she is put into a holding area until the fish are checked again in a few days. When a ripe fish is identified, she is brought over to a killing bench where a baseball bat is used to kill her with one solid hit on the head. She is then put into a tank full of ice and water to keep the eggs cool until they are taken out of the fish. This process continues time after time until the number of eggs that need to be taken is reached.

The fish is picked up by the head by inserting your hand into one side of the gills while placing your hand on the ovadepositer near the tail so eggs will not flow out and onto the ground. The belly of the fish is wiped off with your hand a couple of times to remove any water and slime that may be on it. The eggs are then stripped from the fish by using a spawning knife to make an incision from the ovadepositer, around the pelvic fins, and up to the isthmus, just below the head. If the fish is completely ripe, the eggs will flow into a bucket or spawning vessel like water. If it is less ripe, it may require you to put your hand into the body cavity through the incision and shake the ovaries and other viscera to get them all out. This is repeated until the eggs of 5 fish are in the spawning vessel or bucket and then another one vessel is used.

When all of the eggs are spawned, the male fish are next. They are killed just like the females were. The male fish are not checked because they are

most likely ripe already. The fish are picked up by the head and gills, and the belly is wiped down like the female. The male fish is spawned by applying pressure to the pelvic fin area which will make the milt flow from the fish into a small jar which is used to collect the milt. Milt from 5 fish is collected and then put aside until the eggs need to be fertilized. It should be kept in a cooler until used.

After all of the milt is taken, from the same number of males as there are females, the eggs are fertilized. Milt is removed from the cooler and poured into the bucket of eggs and then stirred into them. They are then put into incubators and will not be touched for several weeks. This process will be covered in one of the next Tech Tips.

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Music

Thanks for listening, for Bellingham Technical College and a Fisheries Tech Tip, I'm Earl Steele

Music fades.