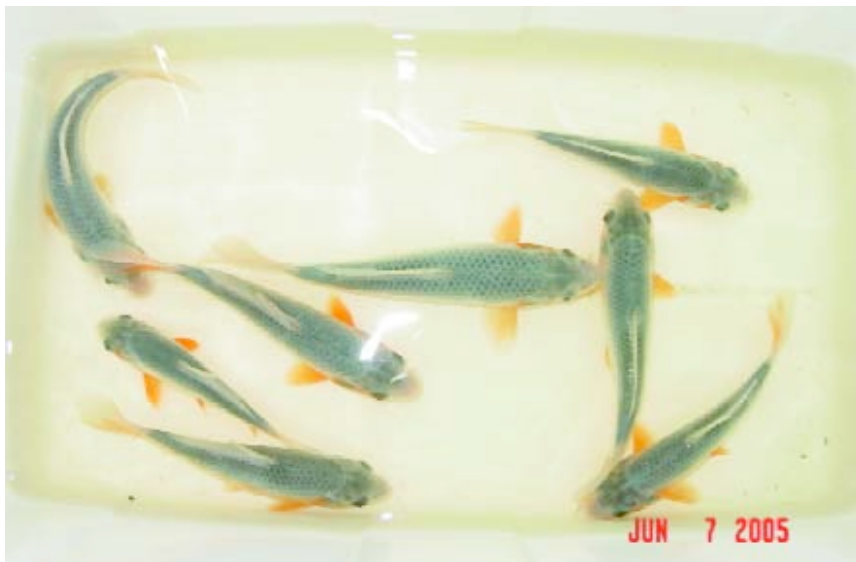


# Asagi Tosai Selection

by Dick Benbow, Washington

## Foreword by Bob Winkler, Colorado

*In this series on selecting koi, I have been utilizing many books, mentors, and any scant knowledge I may be able to contribute to help others, and myself, pick koi with a "picture" of how they might develop. When it came time to write the Asagi "chapter," I considered many sources. Dick Benbow is at the top of many people's list for Asagi. He has been well known in koi circles to be a top koi collector and "handler" for years, with always a soft spot for Asagi. His knowledge is much sought after. In recent years, he has taken this to another level. He now primarily keeps Asagi in his pond in Washington state, and also breeds them there. Not for sale, but for his own enjoyment. This is truly koi kichi.*



## ***And now, Dick Benbow on Asagi:***

**T**his "chore" of selection is about as difficult as it gets with any color variety of koi. But show me a koi-kichi that doesn't love a challenge and I'll show you a filled in pond pushing up daisies!

Here are some ideas to keep in mind in the selection process. Asagi gain red year after year. So if you only select tosai that are perfectly marked at one year old, in all likelihood you will end up with a koi that has too much red in the end. The end you say? Well Asagi does not come into its own until the age of three. That's when the blue back and white fukurin establish themselves. It's at this time you truly know what you have.

So let's focus on what we can tell with the koi at hand. The easiest job is to take the available koi for inspection and collect them all in a blue bowl. Remove all koi that do not have straight spines and all of their fins. In body shape look for the koi that shows a deeper shoulder than their brothers or sisters. The first thing we look for is white noses. The forehead will be a grey color, but not to worry; by the age of three it will clear up. The area I refer to as the nose is from the end of the mouth back to a line drawn between the two eyes. Return the koi that don't make this cut.

Next look at the gill cover. We want to find red completely encircling the gill cover in what I would describe as a narrow donut affair. If not found look for red at the underside of the gill plate up about a third of the way.

The next critical area is the red on the belly. The Japanese refer to this red with a word that translates ship's red bottom. The appropriate red can best be described as an intense reddish orange. However I have seen blood red and while not the standard still incredibly beautiful! Here's where it gets difficult. Depending on the breeder and the genes used, you can find red on the belly itself by rolling the tosai over and inspecting underneath or you can see the red already up the sides to the lateral line. Chances are you won't have a clue as to which way to go. And that is why most Japanese hobbyists will buy half a dozen tosai and raise them up to three years of age to see what develops. In a perfect world you would find a youngster with white on the bottom of the belly and red showing along the sides but not up to the lateral line. Chances are these are being held to grow on but it's nice to know what to look for. Discard any tosai that has red over the lateral line. If you find some critically close selections that have red well down in the chest area but already up to the lateral line or a little over at the body/tail joint, these go back as well. Red can quite easily run over the back at the tail in the immediate future.

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Next, we're looking at the pecs. Back to our perfect world and we spy some that have red that fills the pec one third or half the way thru. This is the best, but again may well be already pulled



**Dan Charnes & Gene Smith  
Breeder: Marusei  
Texas Koi and Fancy Goldfish Society Show 2006  
Photo by Bob Brudd**



**Bob Brudd buying an Asagi from Toshio Sakai  
Photo provided by Bob Brudd**

by the breeder to grow on. So we look for a red pec that may show a tip of white. This is critical. Not always but most of the time the red will pull back on a full red pec to accomplish what we want by the age of three. If you cannot find one with any white don't get discouraged it can still happen.

Next, let's look at the tail. If you can find a spot of color on the tail again like the pec with a third to half colored so much the better. If no one has the red in the tail we continue on with a look at the dorsal.

In our perfect world we look for red at the very base not way up high in the fin. Just along the base. If you can find it spaced every so often that is excellent but you may only find this red in one spot closer to the front of the dorsal. If the dorsal is clear, with no red; we're still in the ball game.

Here's the background for understanding. When the Asagi-han or blue back completes at the age of three and ready for show, here's some of what the judges are looking for. Red in the tail, dorsal and pecs. This strong show of color is difficult to come by. Because red in the dorsal is a dangerous sign that the koi will complete its red fill-in with more red than wanted. Only a very few select tategoi have red in the dorsal without over running some place else. So if your Asagi completes its pattern and has red about a third in the pec and red in the tail about the same amount and your competition has red only in the pecs, you've got the advantage.

If you feed color food to your baby then you are encouraging the red to aggressively establish.

I think the reason why most don't stay with Asagi is that in the water we cultivate to make gosanke successful works against Asagi. A strong GH and your Asagi begins to develop black spots and graying white forehead. Pond readings should be around 7.4 for PH, under 100 for Gh and Kh to suit the needs of our special color variety.

Asagi was the first color variety established and all other color varieties were developed from this koi. They tend to be very strong as they are closest to the wild carp. They will jump and fight you. They are the hardest to handle. Yet in critical shows where everything matters, an Asagi that has popped scales in a struggle and regrows them will exhibit lighter color scales which is a sizeable mark down. None the less, I love these koi.

To me there is something very special about Asagi. I hope this article will give you some understanding in the selection process. ❖

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