



The Plant Professionals

Watergardening

Water, whether still or moving, creates a romantic mystique in any garden. Water gardens are the province of exotic and beautiful plants, iridescent, dragonflies, bashful goldfish, and bullfrog serenades. But the mysteries of creating and maintaining a water garden need not forbid you the pleasure it can bring! The basics are remarkably easy to master, and stewardship of a garden pool can be quite carefree compared to "dirt gardening". A two week vacation without watering? No worry, the plants are still standing in the water. Relatively few insect problems, and best of all, no weeds! Sounds too good to be true? It's not. It's too good to miss! All you need is a friend to get you started, and we hope that's us.

Water gardens can be wood, plastic, or metal containers, fiberglass preformed ponds, concrete, or plastic liners installed above or in the ground. For a balance between ease of installation, good performance, and low cost, we prefer the plastic liners. However, someone wanting to "get their feet wet" without "taking the plunge" might start with a tub garden, any container large enough to hold 10"-24" of water.

Most waterlilies require 18" or more of water depth, and 4-8 hours of sun, but a few lilies and many go plants can make do with less. If you want lots of blooms, look for a sunny spot. Do not place your pond where water will run into it from the yard or roof, incoming water could have undesirable materials or could come in such volume as to wash out your plants and fish. Above ground ponds built of stacked landscape timbers with a pond liner keep most flooding, blowing trash, kids and dogs from falling into the water. If capped with 2" x 8" lumber, a great garden seat is provided. In-ground ponds excavated and lined with a pond liner give more freedom of shape and an opportunity to plant terrestrial plant varieties right up to the pond edge. Be sure to eliminate any puncture hazards before placing the liner. Liner materials should be sized 4'- 6' wider and longer than proposed pond to lap up the sides, and liner should be carefully adjusted and corners or curves folded to take up excess liner material while there is only an inch or two of water in it, then filled completely.

Water lilies are the Queen of the Water Garden. Wide-ranging in color and form, they can be divided basically into hardies and tropicals. Tropicals can be either day or night blooming, usually have richer fragrance, and bloom more heavily through the hottest months. Hardies start blooming earlier in the spring and will survive the coldest winter. Each class having its advantages, a mix is very appropriate.

When choosing waterlilies, be sure to pick varieties compatible with the size of your pond, and don't succumb to the common temptation to put in too many. At maturity, the water lilies and all other plants should cover 60-75% of the water surface, enough to shade out undesirable free-floating algae and provide cover for fish, but still allow some clear surface for reflection and room for all plants to get the sun they require.

Lotus are relatives of waterlilies, but form unique leaves held above the water surface and have larger blooms followed by ornamental seedpods. Bogs (or marginal) plants such as iris, pickerel rush, and parrot's feathers are grown for beautiful flowers or foliage, or both. They usually require shallow water, and so are set on ledges or blocked up with bricks. Combining plants to create an outstanding watergarden requires contrast of form and color, a sense of balance and proportion between the different plants, and a consideration of appearance in all seasons.

Submerged plants, such as anacharis, cabomba, and myriophyllum, are the unseen and unappreciated workers of the pond. They are purposely planted in sand or gravel and never fertilized, therefore, they draw their nutrients out of the pond water, filtering and purifying it. They also release valuable oxygen into the water. Black Japanese snails are seldom seen but always at work, consuming decaying plant material. Goldfish and guppies eat any mosquito larvae unlikely enough to hatch in your pond and help keep down algae to desirable levels by browsing on it. Do not overstock or overfeed fish in your pond. A successful pond is a balanced system, and the best way to keep the fish in balance is don't put too many and don't feed them much, if at all.

When the pond is filled, expect it to look a little stark and empty at first, then expect to be dismayed by a sudden and incredibly prolific algae bloom. Just be patient for your desirable plants to grow and shade out the algae and the pond will come into balance by 4-6 weeks. Dumping out the water and refilling will only delay the process. At first filling and any subsequent addition of more than 1" of water, add Aquasafe Pond Formula to make water safe for fish.

Pond maintenance is a matter of only a few minutes a week, if undertaken regularly, Remove old leaves and blooms, fertilize lilies and bog plants at least monthly during the growing season with PondTabs pushed into the soil beside plants. Pick off occasional caterpillars, and wash aphids off plants in the pond where fish will eat them like candy. Plants will need dividing and re-planting when they get too cramped. Watch for decreased bloom and light colored leaves despite fertilization. Gosh, we're out of room here, so please ask us about anything, and please come back to share with us the knowledge and joy you're sure to get from gardening.

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