

PONDERING PONDS

By Ken Schoen

Add a water feature for soothing sounds & sights

There's still time to put in a pond before summer. If you have visions of spreading plants, hungry fish and a water feature of your own, here's how to get the backyard pond—small or large—of your dreams.



GETTING STARTED If you don't have a pond but want one, first think about how much space you want to devote and where you think it should go. I try to place the pond as close as possible to the house, so it can be heard and seen from inside rooms. Many pond catalogs say to place the pond away from trees to keep out leaves. I like having trees near or even overhanging my ponds. Partial sun for a pond is better than full sun, and the trees look beautiful. Think about your budget. If it's a koi pond, the larger the pond, the larger the filtration system needed. But the #1 thing I hear from pond people is, "I wish I'd made it larger!"

QUIET RESPITE
Lining a pond with rocks will help to give it the naturalistic look so popular today.
PHOTO: Bill Mathews



PHOTO: Courtesy, Ken Schoen

RELIABLE POND PLANTS

Adding plant life With summer warmth, your plants should be starting to flourish. Free-floating plants like water hyacinths and water lettuce can actually start to spread so fast that they can take over your small backyard pond. These plants should not be used in natural or larger ponds. Don't cover more than 50 percent of your surface area. Use the extras for compost or donate to friends. Water lilies and lotus should be fertilized monthly for the best results. In the beginning, try to buy the largest and healthiest-looking plants possible. They are worth the premium price. Once you are more experienced, you'll be able to grow great looking plants yourself.



PHOTO: Mark Lohman

LIFE AQUATIC

To add even more interest to a backyard pond, add water-loving plants like lotus and water lilies, as well as fish such as koi.

WATER WORKS

When planning your backyard pond, take into consideration placement and size. Also research which plants will work well in and around damp areas.

Managing large ponds

Much of what's true for smaller backyard ponds can also apply to big ponds. Forget about UV filters; aeration, however, can make a difference. If there's no electricity right near the pond, the aeration unit can be located even 1,000 feet away from the pond with only a small, shallowly buried air line running to the pond. I get a lot of calls during the summer about water levels dropping and ponds that don't look as good as they did in spring and fall. Creative edge work with rocks, plantings and waterfalls can help the lower water levels so they still look attractive.

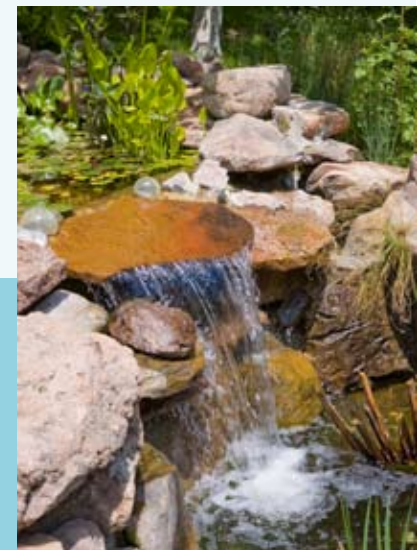


PHOTO: Mark Lohman

FISHY BUSINESS

Any fish you've added will get hungrier as the water temperature rises... but when it becomes too hot, they eat less. If the water temperature goes above 85 degrees F, feed sparingly, and only in the morning or evening. In the spring, feed fish a few times a week, up to once a day. In summer, you can feed them two or three times a day. Automatic feeders are also available. Start with a few hardy goldfish in the beginning, until your filter has started building up its good bacteria, which will help break down the waste from your fish. Koi, especially large ones that eat a lot of food, should come later.

Aeration is a good idea, especially for a backyard pond with larger koi. If you see your fish "gasping" at the water surface or hanging out near a waterfall, they probably need more oxygen. The warmer the water, the less oxygen it can hold. Waterfalls are not the most efficient aeration systems, but they are better than nothing. It is more important that the waterfall is on at night than during the day. Because of the photosynthesis cycle, plants and algae add to the oxygen level in the day but are using it up at night.



PHOTO: Courtesy, Ken Schoen

If your water is too green...

Water lilies and floating plants can help shield part of the pond from the sun, while underwater or oxygenating plants can help use up the nutrients that are feeding the green water. You could also consider a UV filter, which should be sized not just based on the size of the pond but also on the amount of sun it receives. Filters work almost like magic. One thing to remember about pond UV filters is to change the bulbs at least every two years.

For more information:

Ken Schoen, owner and founder of Waterscapes (koiponds.com), has a Master Rating from the National Pond Society. He has specialized in ponds and other water features in the Hudson Valley area of New York and beyond for more than 20 years. If you have a pond question, e-mail him at pondbuilder@verizon.net. Or, you can write to him at Waterscapes, 155 Washington Avenue, Kingston, NY 12401.