

The Trickle of Moving Water

by Candace Mullen, Bell County Master Gardener

The trickle of moving water, the soft sounds of breezes through the rushes and a clear soft day lying in the hammock listening to the sounds of nature -- doesn't everyone wish to experience the ambience? Well, that desire started us on the quest for a serene, restful experience in our own backyard. The fateful sentence was uttered, "Let's build a pond!" and Ed and I started on our journey of understanding and smashed fingers!

We are two do-it-yourselfers willing to take on projects we've never attempted and we also have an unlimited supply of confidence we can solve any problem we encounter. So building a pond seemed a likely project we could do ourselves. Oh, we had several resources we knew we could call on. We have good friends who have a wonderful series of ponds, Steve and Sandy Menczer, and they had built them. We had a son, Carter, who is a wildlife biologist to help design and tell us how to attract "critters"; and best of all, we had a good friend, Hal Schiffman, who could work a backhoe! We felt fully prepared and confident this project would be a matter of a few weekends and a snap to do.

So, you may ask us, how do you start? Believe me, you don't start by renting a backhoe and digging a hole. That's the way we started -- big mistake! You really start by doing research. You look up ponds and water features at the library, check out books, look at pictures, check out the Internet, and take a pond tour if possible. At the very least, you visit and talk to another pond owner and ask questions about everything. Visit local nurseries and discover the prices of all the equipment and paraphernalia you will need.

Step two: decide where you want the location to be in your yard. You have to factor in sun, slope, visibility, size, type, purpose and depth. Everyone we talked to said that they wished they had put in a pond twice the size they had, so we started with a large size instead of a small one. We decided we didn't want an artificial filter system, so a bog system was designed. We decided we wanted to see and hear the pond from our back deck so a slope became the location. The slope then became a stream and the top of it became a waterfall leading into a small pool, then into the stream, the bog and into a larger pool that would be the major attraction.

The design was drawn out roughly on a piece of paper, the slope and elevation figured, size of pump determined, number of fittings and connections decided and a liner size measured. We mail ordered the liner and pump and got ready to start. Oh, don't forget the sticky double-sided tape and the black foam sealant with dispenser. Special rubber and fittings biologically friendly to fish and animals are necessary.

We then dug the holes with a backhoe; ever try to put a shovel into rock hard calechie. in mid August in Texas? Doesn't work too well and it breaks shovel handles! It took one whole day to use a rented backhoe and a lot longer than we had figured. We knew we would need padding under the liner, so we had been saving newspapers for weeks and a friend was replacing carpeting so we begged the old pieces. We lined all the holes with our collected padding and then placed the liner over the whole project. The liner alone weighed over 400 pounds and needed several strong adults to stretch and position it correctly! It is necessary to treat your friends and family well, feed and nurture them; they come in handy when building a pond!

We had been collecting rocks for weeks, and thought that we had more than enough to start lining the pond edges. A word of advice, collect at least twice as many rocks as you think you will need, 'cause you will need them! We didn't believe the stories about placing rocks but soon found out that is the second most important thing you need to know. Every rock has to be positioned for effect and efficiency by hand. You find yourself riding along and noticing side of the road rocks and planning how you can load them into the trunk without loading fire ants also! You whole focus in life changes! Our rule now is, if you come to see the pond, you have to bring a rock.

What you may ask is the first most important thing you have to know and do to have a successful pond? We found out later when we had to go back and fix that particular problem. It is, "Make sure the pond is LEVEL!" I can't emphasize enough those wise words. You will have major problems if you don't make sure

everything is level. We found that out for sure.

We finally "finished" the pond in October, the load of topsoil arrived and landscaping the area started. Our adventure seemed to be complete and we were determined to rest on our laurels for a long time. We love the sounds and sights of the pond. The variety of wildlife that visit is amazing (the raccoon likes the minnows and bog plants) the dragonflies, butterflies, and bees are constant visitors, and the birds drink and take baths daily in the shallows. A person can lose himself for long periods of time sitting by the side of the pond listening and sometimes work doesn't get done!

We also learned that the pond is never "finished". We are already talking about adding another branch to the stream, changing the waterfall, and adding more things to the area to enjoy the setting. This summer will be lazy weekends of lying in the hammock, sipping a cool drink, and listening to the sounds of moving water during the hottest part of a Texas summer. Think about creating your own paradise -- it's worth the work and smashed fingers! Come, see, and bring a rock!