

Planting Your Pond

by Joyce Friels, Bell County Master Gardener

The first step in planting your pond is planning. Determine the garden's main viewpoint that is the place where it will most often be seen by you and guests. To get a clear view of the water place large leaved and taller plants to the rear of the pond. Small plants and flowers should be placed in front. Use some grasses, such as Mexican feather grass, along with marginal or bog plants for texture and unity. Always consider the mature size of each plant so that the garden in and around the pond doesn't get overgrown and hide the view that you want to achieve. Also, take into consideration the look of the pond throughout the year. You want to achieve some continuous color and texture from spring through winter. To do this, always choose quality plants over quantity and select evergreen plants for at least a third of the pond area.

Before choosing the number of plants, calculate the surface area of the pond. To find a pond's volume, first calculate its area, which is the length times the width, then multiply the area by the average depth and a conversion factor (7.5). (Area = Length x Width and Volume = Area x Average Depth x 7.5) To achieve proper light penetration, and to allow harmful gases such as carbon dioxide to escape the pond, these plantings should cover no more than two-thirds of the water's surface. The different depth requirements of various types of water garden plants are achieved with shelves or concrete blocks. For easy removal and rearranging, plants that root in soil should be placed in baskets or buckets without holes. For good blooms and foliage throughout the seasons always use clay soil and fertilizer tablets when first potting the plants. Water lilies should be fertilized every month during the growing and blooming season. Stop feeding them in October. They will go dormant during the winter months and start growing again in the spring. The best rule for dividing water garden plants is: plants that bloom in the spring (like irises) should be repotted and divided in the fall. Divide and repot water lilies in February or March before they start their new growth. New plants can be added anytime during the growing months of spring and summer.

There are so many varieties of plants that can be used in a pond garden. You can choose as few or as many different ones that you like. However, too many species can grow into a jumbled mess and confuse the look you want to reach. Use a combination of colorful blooming plants and evergreen plants. Planting a pond can be both challenging and exciting. When selecting pond plants, apply the same rules that you do in choosing plants for your dry flowerbeds. Always look for healthy plants at the various nurseries that carry water plants. And include a trip to a retail water garden nursery to see the species in their natural growing habitat. Ask the supplier about the age and growth habits of the plants that you want to try in your pond garden.

When planning for plants try a variety of forms, colors, textures and bloom times. Before you buy a plant find out how well behaved it is. Water-garden plants, especially floaters, have a tendency to be invasive in ideal climates. Some states ban certain water species because they clog the natural waterways; i.e., water lettuce. Invasive plants can be a maintenance headache; however, some plants are fish friendly and some are not. Duckweed, for example, is invasive but a favorite food for goldfish and koi. The fish will eat it rapidly and keep it under control. Water movement is another element to plan for. Deep-water plants such as water lilies and other floaters prefer water this is nearly or completely still. Other plants thrive in fast-moving currents. Still others do well in either. The hardiness of a perennial plant can often be extended by simply lowering it below the expected ice depth in autumn. Most winters in Central Texas are mild so I have had no problems with water plants freezing.

Pond garden plants are grouped into three types: Floaters are plants that have their leaves and blooms on the surface of the water and their roots dangling loose beneath the surface or planted in pots. The floater group includes Duckweed, Penny Wort, Parrot's Feather, Four-Leaf Clover and Yellow Snowflake, and the deep-water plants such as the water lilies and lotuses. Marginal/Bog plants are those that do best around the pond's shelf where their feet can be in shallow water and their heads waving in the breeze. They enjoy being in water that is two to six inches deep and they serve to link the pond with the surrounding landscape. Some of these plants are the Louisiana iris, Arrowhead, Canna, Cattail, Umbrella plant and Horsetail to name a few. Submerged plants for the pond garden are the key to maintaining clear water. They do need sunlight and are subject to fish nibbling. These plants are also referred to as oxygenating plants. They are indispensable to a balanced garden, taking in carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen

necessary for the survival of other plants and fish. Oxygenators also provide a safe spawning area for fish and a hiding place for small fish. There are several varieties to choose from that will give you good texture to look at and some do bloom under water.

Planning is the key to the enjoyment of having and maintaining a water pond garden. Be bold and experiment by selecting plants that you enjoy looking at. As you talk to others and visit water garden nurseries notice the clarity of the water. When you examine the healthiest unfiltered water gardens you find that those with the cleanest water have a mix of floaters, submerged plants, and deep-water plants. As the seasons go by, you will be content and happy looking at your water garden when you follows these suggestions. By creating an oasis for you, your family and your friends, you are also making an environment that encourages the wildlife to partake of the water, shelter, and food sources.