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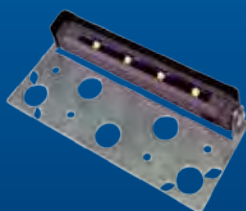
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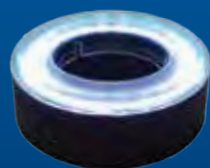
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8 Raising Arizona POND CONSTRUCTION

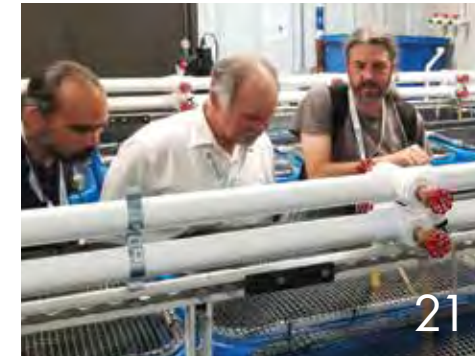
Building a waterscape in an arid desert environment requires some special considerations to make sure a client's expectations are met. Just ask **Joe Brenner**, whose pondless waterfall and stream project presented unique challenges that stimulated his creativity and culminated in a desert oasis.

16 More Than Just a Paycheck

If you're a contractor, you've certainly had the payroll conversation. Do you know the differences between paying an employee versus an independent contractor? Do you know what SUTA is? Let **Mark Battersby** make sure your knowledge is up to date and your business is compliant.

21 Adventures in Aquaponics

Have you considered dipping your toe into aquaponics? According to **Ken Rust**, it has two big advantages at the outset — no weeding, and you don't have to bend over to pick your lettuce! Learn what the buzz is about and decide whether this sustainable growing hobby is for you.



27 Stop, Look & Listen

Sometimes the best inspiration can come from Mother Nature herself. **Kelly Billing** shares a personal narrative about finding romanticism in the garden.

36 The Common Essentials COVER STORY

Summer's here, which means recreational ponds and natural swimming pools sound all the more enticing! **Frayne McAtee** offers a few things to keep in mind.

43 Sleeping with the Enemy?

If you're part of a family-owned operation, **Barbi Holdeman** has some sage advice for you. Get her take on how to enjoy the pros while avoiding all the cons.

50 Koi Pond Wisdom LANGUAGE OF KOI

Mark Gibson is proud to have kept koi for more than 20 years. With multiple trips to Japan under his belt, he shares some lessons he's learned over the years.

55 Hidden in Plain Sight

It's time to flash back to our January/February 2016 issue and **Kent Wallace's** Best Practices installment with tips and strategies for hiding your filtration equipment.

60 Show Us Your Trophies!

We were excited to catch up with the 2022 Water Artisans of the Year for a quick photo op and reaction to their victory earlier this year.

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Upcoming Events

2023

July - August (5 Saturdays)

Lotus Entertain You Garden Tour
Kansas City Water Garden Society
Various locations
www.kcwatergarden.com

August 25 - September 4

Water Gardens at MN State Fair
Minnesota Water Garden Society (MWGS)
Minnesota State Fair
Falcon Heights, Minnesota
www.MWGS.org

October 18 - 20

Hardscape North America
Kentucky Exposition Center
Louisville, Kentucky
www.hardscapena.com

October 19

Your Pond Farm Trade Show
Trade Show at the Farm
Barto, Pennsylvania
www.yourpondfarm.com

October 25 - 27

Your Pond Farm Trade Show
Atlantic-OASE Professional Conference
Cleveland, Ohio
www.atlantic-oase.com/conference

November 13 - 15

International POOL | SPA | PATIO Expo
Las Vegas Convention Center
Las Vegas, Nevada

Are you attending an event that you think others should know about? Are you hosting an event and want more people to come? Send event information to llgelles@pondtrademag.com.



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Publisher's Perspective

Rec Pond Mania!

Recreational or rec ponds have been quite the hot topic for a few years now, and it seems even more so the case this summer season. POND Trade has covered quite a few pond construction articles about these dual-purpose pond builds for wildlife and people, both in our print issue as well as in our online "Contractor's



Corner" monthly feature.

As you may have noticed, we've got a stunning one on the cover of this issue. Rec ponds really are a different ballgame, because you have to keep in mind proper filtration and water quality for koi, pets and humans alike. As outdoor temperatures start to sizzle, I can totally understand why these pond builds are so "hot" right now!

Frayne McAtee breaks it all down for you on pg. 36 ("The Common Essentials") and explains the difference between recreational ponds and natural swimming pools. He also provides answers to many of the common questions customers tend to ask about them.

After you get your rec pond fix, make sure you check out everything else we've packed inside this issue. Ken Rust's article on aquaponics ("Adventures in Aquaponics," pg. 21) points out a lot of the similarities between the water feature and aquaponics industries. It just might make you want to look more into it. I also enjoyed Barbi Holdeman's aptly titled article ("Sleeping with the Enemy?" pg. 43) about running a successful business with her husband Paul. I've been fortunate to hear her tell their story at conferences, and this article certainly does it justice. We are also happy to have Kelly Billing back to write a personal piece about the romanticism of plants ("Stop, Look & Listen," pg. 27). She looks back at the evolution of how she has gathered inspiration from nature over the course of her life — which I frankly found inspiring!

Finally, we are giving one more shout out to the winners of the 2022 Water Artisans of the Year contest. Don't miss them (with their trophies!) and their smiling faces on pg. 65.

Happy PONDering!

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Raising Arizona

Pondless waterfall & stream are the envy of the desert



This pondless waterfall comes to life at dusk with shimmering lights illuminating the flowing stream.

by Joe Brenner,
Arizona Aquascapes

Ah, the soothing sound of a waterfall — there's nothing quite like it. It's no wonder that many dream of having their own backyard oasis for relaxing and unwinding.

As an artist who designs natural water features, I was tasked with creating a magnificent pondless waterfall that would be the envy of this backyard. The client had a clear vision of what they wanted — the peaceful sound of nature captured in their backyard with a 50-foot stream carving through the landscape with numerous waterfall drops.

Oasis in the Desert

As a Certified Aquascape Contractor, I am always looking for unique and challenging projects that allow me to unleash my creativity and create oasis-like spaces that offer solace and tranquility. When my client approached me about building a pondless waterfall on his two-acre property in Gilbert, Arizona, I knew I had found my next opportunity to bring a little paradise to the desert.

One design approach that can create a beautiful and natural-looking feature is to embrace curves throughout the landscape and incorporate waterfall drops for added visual interest. We wanted a location for the water feature that was both visible and accessible. Ideally, it should be in an area where people can enjoy the water's sound and the feature's beauty.

Once the location was determined, it was time to add detail to the feature. In the design process, we orchestrated a stunning bridge installed over a gently flowing stream. This magnificent structure is the centerpiece of the water feature and can be a stunning addition to any landscape. The bridge adds a touch of beauty to the surroundings and makes the stream accessible to anyone who wishes to get closer



to its natural beauty.

The bridge was designed to merge seamlessly with the surrounding environment. The natural wooden planks and handrails complement the existing plant life, making crossing over the stream feel like a walk in the park. The lighting on the bridge illuminates it in the dark, making it a breathtaking sight to behold at night. The waterfall drop is also beautifully lit, bringing the viewers close to its natural beauty.

This bridge is also more than a structure. It symbolizes connection, unity and community. It offers accessibility to the water feature, creating an excellent opportunity for visitors to view the wildlife that calls the stream home.

We decided to start with a blank canvas and carefully selected the perfect boulders and materials to create a 50-foot pondless waterfall, complete with a 5-foot-wide stream, multiple waterfall drops and a bridge centerpiece. I was thrilled to be able to incorporate my client's vision into the design, selecting plants that would thrive in Arizona's hot and arid climate while also providing a tranquil and relaxing atmosphere. The sound of the water is now a constant presence in the garden, providing my clients with a sense of calm and serenity whenever they need it.

Let the Rocks Speak

When choosing materials

for a feature, natural stones and boulders are great choices to create the look of a natural stream, creating steps and tiers for the water to cascade down and adding to the dynamic design.

The process of bringing this vision to life involved a variety of materials, including 36 tons of Carmel Express boulders ranging from 1 to 3 feet in size and 12 tons of cobble river rocks. Handpicking natural stone for a water feature can be an enriching experience. It unlocks a whole new level of creativity, allowing you to create unique and original designs that blend seamlessly with their surroundings. Natural stones offer a range of beautiful colors and textures that give an organic look to any outdoor space. In addition, these stones' different shapes and sizes create a sense of cohesiveness that mimics the random arrangement you'd see in nature.

The process of handpicking natural stone for your water feature requires working closely with your stone supplier to identify rocks that match your expectations. When you take your time and listen to what the stones have to say, you can discover the perfect match for your water feature. You may find that some stones speak more loudly than others, and building around them is more manageable. Others may be perfect for small accents here and there. The more stones you discover, the greater the

From top to bottom (left): As the sun rises on this beautiful spring morning, construction begins on this 50-foot pondless waterfall. During construction, these innovative modules are precisely measured before the liner is installed. Pre-installation of this steel bridge ensures the perfect placement and size of boulders along the stream. With the rocks carefully placed, it's time to add the finishing touches. The final 10% of a project can make all the difference.



The mini excavator (top, left) carefully places a boulder to enhance the natural charm along the stream. Accent stones and lush plants (top, right) artfully arranged along the edge create a serene and inviting atmosphere. With the stream flowing and plants in place (below, right), we installed a drip system and misters along the water's edge.

opportunity to create a unique and stunning water feature that is one of a kind.

Once the best stones have been selected, each boulder is carefully strapped and lifted, fitting perfectly into the design. Placement is everything when it comes to natural stones in a water feature. They must be naturally positioned with a beautiful passage of water that gives them an enchanting, natural look. The beautiful colors, textures and shapes they offer can transform a simple water feature into a stunning, functional, beautiful masterpiece. Working with natural materials can be unpredictable, but we overcame each obstacle with careful planning.

Perfecting the Details

One of the most important aspects of any water-garden project is ensuring the details are perfect. Every detail counts,

from the plants we select to the angles of the boulders and the placement of the waterfall drops. As we worked on the pondless waterfall, we were careful to pay attention to even the smallest details, using waterfall foam to seal the waterfall drops and achieve the perfect water flow using smart controllers.

We also carefully selected the plants that would surround the waterfall, choosing species that would thrive in the desert climate while also adding to the overall atmosphere of the oasis. And, of course, the lighting was also an important consideration, with subtle LED lights illuminating the waterfalls and adding to the ambiance of the space.

The key components of this project were the reservoir holding 50 large Aquablox and the installation of two SLD 5000-9000 pumps with smart controllers. A remarkable feature of the smart controller is the ability to





The illuminated waterfall (top) and the rhythmic flow of boulders and driftwood along the stream created a captivating display. Witness the transformation (bottom) from a blank slate to a stunning pondless waterfall as we brought nature to life.

control the flow using your phone. How cool is that? We strategically positioned two waterfall spillways at the start of the waterfall, which not only created an impressive sight but, when combined with an inviting pool, also effectively disguised the spillways. Our choice of a 45-mil EPDM liner was perfect for this project, allowing for creating seams as necessary due to the stream's curvature around the bridge.

One essential material that cannot be overlooked is geotextile underlayment. Laying this fabric above and below the liner can provide increased protection for this material, especially from the large boulders. Also, taking time during the plumbing process is a crucial step that cannot be rushed or overlooked. When laying out new systems, it's vital to always ensure accuracy.

One of the unique pieces we added was the edge work, which we left until the end to allow for any last-minute adjustments. This enabled us to create extra room in the stream for aesthetics and functionality.

The project was not without its challenges, as we had to work around the client's existing garden, pool and outdoor entertainment areas. From navigating the landscape and building-block walls for flood irrigation to working around the hot Arizona weather and ensuring that the water flow was just right, there were many obstacles to overcome. But with the right approach and a committed team, we were able to find

solutions to every challenge that arose, using our expertise in landscaping and design to navigate every obstacle.

Terrain Changes

As nature enthusiasts, we often search for new and innovative ways to incorporate natural elements into our living spaces. In this project, we set out to elevate the spaces to create a serene and captivating environment that seamlessly integrated with the existing landscape.

We incorporated a series of elevation changes that created a dynamic, engaging design, enhancing the natural flow of the water. One of the standout elements of the project is the bridge that elegantly connects the two sides of the stream, serving as a centerpiece for the entire design.

It wasn't just about aesthetics; we also considered the practical aspects of the design. By elevating the spaces, we created a more efficient use of the area, providing ample room for the stream and waterfall while maintaining an open and spacious feel. The result is a breathtaking and harmonious space that not only enhances the area's beauty but also provides a sense of tranquility and relaxation.

This inspired us to use various plants like twisted myrtle, asparagus fern, upright rosemary, Dwarf Japanese Juniper, Portulacaria afra, Leucophyllum Lang and Cordyline 'Red Sensation.' These plants added life

We incorporated a series of elevation changes that created a dynamic, engaging design, enhancing the natural flow of the water.

and color to the project and helped create a more natural and calming environment. Aside from plants, natural materials such as wood, stone and statues can also add a touch of nature to any space.

Building Trust with Clients

As a pond builder, one of the most important aspects of my job is building trust with my clients. When it comes to creating a beautiful and functional water feature, communication and collaboration are key.

To start off, I make sure to keep an open communication chain with my clients from the very beginning. This includes being available for emails, phone calls and in-person meetings. I answer any questions they may have and provide detailed explanations of the entire process of building a pond or pondless water feature.

It's also important to show my clients that I appreciate their artistic vision and love what I do. I want them to feel like they can trust that I will bring their dream inspiration for their project to life. This involves actively listening to their wants and needs and incorporating their ideas into the design process.

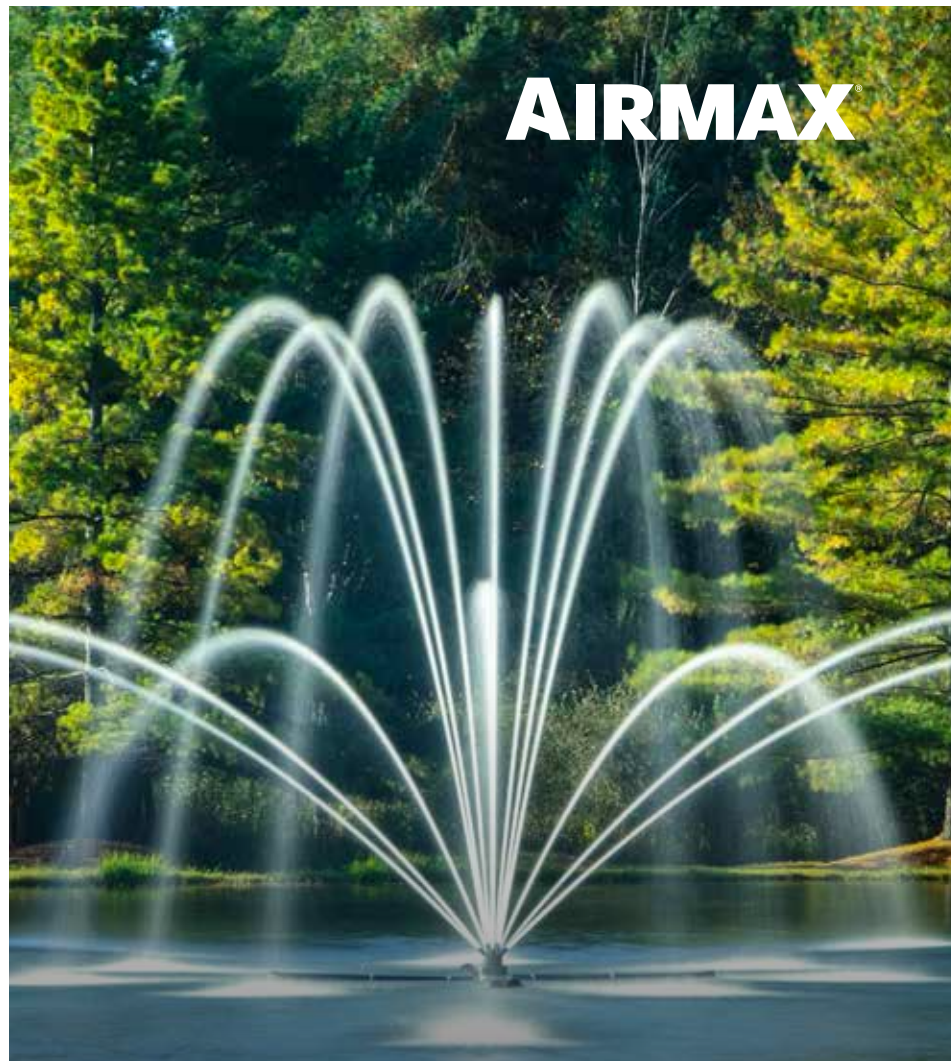
Another crucial aspect of building trust with clients is ensuring all decision makers

are present for the planning and beginning stages of the project. This ensures that all parties are on the same page and are happy and satisfied with their decisions before moving forward with the project.

Throughout the build, I try to keep my clients' best interests at heart and work toward creating a water feature that fulfills their desires and needs. I take the time to understand what they want to see in the final project and follow through with their inspiration to ensure it is reflected in the final design. Building trust with clients takes time and effort, but providing a successful and enjoyable experience is well worth prioritizing open communication, collaboration and a commitment to the client's vision.

Stay Inspired

Inspiration can come from the smallest things, whether it's the sound of the stream or the rhythm of nature. As a creative designer, I take in everything around me and use it to make something beautiful. Our team at Arizona Aquascapes uses these creative elements to create water features that are functional and beautiful. We want to bring the natural world closer to our clients, and by doing so, we bring



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My daughter is full of joy as she puts the final touches on a pondless waterfall, creating a cherished family memory.

peace and serenity to their lives.

In the end, our inspiration came from the environment and the client's desire to have a unique and beautiful outdoor space. With some creativity and inspiration, we delivered an attractive water feature that will bring joy to the client for years to come. ☞

About the Author

Joe Brenner, a nature enthusiast and entrepreneur, grew up in Delano, Minnesota. From a young age, his fascination with the beauty of nature was fueled by spending countless weekends at his family cabin. He began his journey as an entrepreneur at 18 by starting a landscaping business. In 2018, he moved to Gilbert, Arizona, and fell in love with exploring the breathtaking beauty of the state. His passion for water features led him to read an Aquascape article, which led him to become a Certified Aquascape Contractor. His motivation comes from the immense support of his fiancé and his daughter, who have always been by his side. He enjoys spending quality time with his family.

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More Than Just a Paycheck

How payroll taxes can impact your business

by Mark E. Battersby

Payroll, typically the biggest expense of any business in the pond and water feature industry, has come a long way since first taxed in 1913. The 16th Amendment to the Constitution gives Congress the “power to lay and collect taxes on incomes.” The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 established the minimum wage, overtime, recordkeeping and youth employment standards, thus further complicating payrolls.

In general, an employer is responsible for its share of certain federal payroll taxes, including employer contributions under the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA). Social Security is financed by a 12.4% payroll tax on wages up to the taxable earnings cap, with half (6.2%) paid by workers and the other half paid by employers. For 2023, the FICA tax is composed on a Social Security Tax of 6.2% on a wage base of \$160,200 (up from \$147,000 in 2022) with the 1.45% Medicare tax applying to all wages.

Comparable rules for self-employment tax apply to self-employed pond professionals. They must pay 12.4% on amounts up to the Social Security wage base and 2.9% for Medicare tax with half of the overall amount deductible.

The above payroll tax rates do not include an additional 0.9% in Medicare tax paid by highly compensated employees on earnings that exceed threshold amounts based on their filing status. Employers must withhold the additional Medicare tax from wages of employees earning more than \$200,000 in a calendar year.

But Wait, There's More ...

Among the responsibilities of every employer

are other payroll costs based on legal requirements or optional benefits offered by the operation. These can include:

* **Worker's Compensation Insurance.** All states require worker's compensation insurance for workers in a business. Although most states make an exception for owners, sole shareholders or only employees, it is the states that set the rates for worker's compensation insurance based on the industry, size and number of employees.

* **State Disability Insurance.** California, Hawaii, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Puerto Rico have mandatory requirements for employers to support programs that pay a portion of a worker's wages for work missed due to caregiving or a disability.

* **Paid Leave.** If your pond business offers time off for personal days, vacation, sick days, parental leave or other purposes, these are part of the payroll process. Paychecks usually list compensation paid as part of an employee's paid-leave benefits, even when the employee's pay is the same as normal.

* **Health Care Costs.** A pond or water feature's business with 50 or more employees is almost always required to provide a health plan for employees under the Affordable Care Act. Health care plans are also an option in many smaller businesses. As part of the payroll process, the employer is responsible for their portion and will deduct any worker-paid portion of the premiums.

* **Retirement Plan Contributions.** If the business sponsors an employee retirement plan, it must manage contributions via the payroll process. Employee contributions will be deducted from their pay, with the



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employer responsible for its matching share.

* **Employee Reimbursements.** A pond retailer, distributor, builder or supplier that funds or reimburses the expense of a home office or work-related travel generally handles them as part of the payroll process and includes them with the employee's paycheck. Income tax rates for reimbursements and other stipends are different from those for regular income and should be classified as such.

* **Extra Withholding.** If an employee has indicated on their Form W-4, Employee's Withholding Certificate, an additional amount that should be withheld each pay period, it should be included with their federal income tax payment.

* **Bonuses.** Bonuses are a way of compensating employees for a good year without becoming locked into increased wages. For withholding purposes, bonuses can be lumped together under the heading "supplemental wages," a heading that includes commissions, overtime pay, payments for accumulated sick leave, awards and prizes, back pay and payments for nondeductible moving expenses.

* **Gifts.** The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) considers most gifts made to employees to be compensation. As a result, those gifts are included in income for tax purposes, and withholding rules generally apply. It is a similar story for gifts, such as cash and cash-equivalent gifts such as gift cards and gift certificates. Gifts of minimal value are exempt.

Other benefits offered by the business, including charity matching, Healthcare Savings Account (HSA) contributions and wellness programs may, depending on the program, involve deductions for employee contributions, require payments into an associated account or include a stipend with the employee's paycheck.

The IRS charges a late fee if an

employer doesn't deposit the employment tax owed on time. Called a Failure to Deposit Penalty, the penalties range from 2% of the unpaid amount for being one to five days late up to 15% of the unpaid amount if it isn't paid 10 days after receipt of the first IRS notice.

State & Local Taxes

In addition to federal payroll taxes,

In addition to federal payroll taxes, most pond professionals are responsible for state payroll taxes. The most common state payroll tax is for state unemployment insurance (SUTA), of which employers cover a full 100%.

most pond professionals are responsible for state payroll taxes. The most common state payroll tax is for state unemployment insurance (SUTA), of which employers cover a full 100%.

Unemployment insurance is based on a tax base that varies state by state. Depending on the state agency, unemployment tax payments are made along with payroll taxes or as a separate payment each taxing period.

Some states collect additional payroll taxes for such things as workforce development, disability insurance and transit, which the business is responsible for paying and deducting from payroll.

Misclassification

Employers, especially those in the pond and water features industry, have long preferred to treat workers as independent contractors, reaping payroll tax savings, no fringe benefits or other expenses associated with employees. Although California and several other states have cracked down on who is and who isn't an independent contractor, and the IRS has announced its own crackdown on misclassification of workers, many businesses continue to lower their tax bills by shifting from having employees to using increasing numbers of independent contractors.

Whether on the federal or state level, the key question is usually the degree of control over the work and who exercises that control that determines the "independent" status. To help, an employer can submit a Form SS-8, Determination of Worker Status for Purposes of Federal Employment Tax and Income Tax Withholding, for a worker classification

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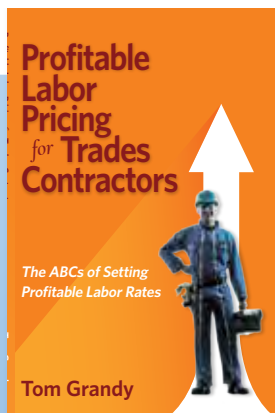
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determination. There is also the IRS's 20-factor common-law test for employers to ensure they are in compliance with both federal and state laws.

Controlling Costs

In addition to the increasingly risky use of independent contractors, there are other strategies for keeping payroll costs manageable. One tax credit, a direct reduction of the operation's tax bill rather than the income on which it is based, is the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, or WOTC.

The WOTC is designed to encourage employers to hire workers from certain targeted groups that historically have found it challenging to find employment. The amount of the tax credit ranges from \$2,400 up to \$9,600 per employee. Generally, the credit equals 40% of the qualified first-year wages for individuals who work at least 400 hours that first year, limited only by the amount of the operation's income tax liability or Social Security tax owed.

The WOTC is available for wages paid to certain individuals who begin work on or before December 31, 2025, and includes members from groups including veterans and recipients of various kinds of public assistance. To qualify for the credit, an employer must first request certification by submitting IRS Form 8850, Pre-Screening Notice and Certification Request for the Work Opportunity Credit, to their state workforce agency (SWA). It must be submitted to the SWA within 28

days after the eligible worker begins work. Employers should not submit Form 8850 to the IRS.

Reimbursing employees for mileage, tools or other job-related expenses typically incurs payroll taxes. However, by establishing an accountable plan, a pond business can avoid paying payroll taxes on these payments, thereby excluding them from employees' taxable income. Naturally, the plan should require employees to provide proper documentation confirming that each expense is work-related.

A pond business might consider offering tax-exempt fringe benefits instead of the more traditional monetary raises. The cost of tax-exempt fringe benefits, such as health benefits, education assistance, dependent care assistance, group term life insurance and retirement planning services, can be deducted similarly to wages and bonuses without a payroll tax obligation. What's more, employees will not owe income or payroll taxes on the benefits.

Obviously, understanding the basic rules for withholding payroll taxes and paying over withheld amounts on the wages of all employees is a good start. Guidance and advice from a competent, qualified advisor is virtually a necessity. ☞

Mark Battersby has 25 years of professional experience in the fields of taxes and finance which enable him to write on unique and topical subjects. He currently writes for publications in a variety of fields and has authored four books.



Attendees at the Aquaponics Conference in 2017 tour a geodesic dome greenhouse with herbs, vegetables and even a banana tree.

Aquaponics Opportunities

Adventures in Aquaponics

What can this industry offer you?

by **Ken Rust**,
Enterprise Aquatics, LLC

I seldom work with water gardens and koi ponds anymore. I have a couple of favorite clients I enjoy helping, but I mostly work in other areas. I enjoyed my time in the water garden and koi pond industry — all the ingenuity and especially the people in the industry building and maintaining water features. You have unique talents and knowhow that are valuable.

Aquaponics is something that you may want to consider as a hobby or as a business opportunity. The principles are similar, and because it is so fast-growing, there is opportunity.

By definition, aquaponics is the combination of recirculating aquaculture and hydroponics. We grow plants hydroponically (without soil) and deliver the nutrients in water to the roots. The roots are all feeder roots instead of structural roots, and the plants are about 25% more productive. Combining this with recirculating aquaculture (growing fish inten-





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sively and filtering the recycled water) provides an organic fertilizer for the plants in the hydroponic system. There are a lot of adaptations for this, including collecting and only using only the fish waste and growing it in a connected loop with the fish.

Why Should You Be Interested?

At this point, I am sure you realize all the similarities it has with water gardening. If you are interested in growing hydroponically (with or without fish) on a hobby level, I will tell you that two advantages are no weeding, and you don't have to bend over to pick your lettuce!

As a water-gardening professional, you have special talents and skills that translate to this industry — the knowledge and ability to teach clients the science of water, biofiltration, water chemistry, PVC plumbing, gravity flow, leak repair, and fish and plant care. Water feature professionals are genuinely innovative, and this industry welcomes innovation.

There are opportunities to expand your business, feed people nutritious food, educate students and join a group of people in the fastest-growing sector of agriculture. Urban farming is growing



This home production system (56 plants in 16" square) is fertilized by fish.



Researchers from universities in New Mexico and Canada inspect the recirculating aquaculture research system at Kentucky State.

fast, and there is \$75 million in federal grants available to nonprofits for implementing innovative technologies for urban farming. Grant recipients would need mentors to supply and help them build and operate an aquaponic system.

A Teaching Tool

Teachers use aquaponics to teach STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), and the teachers need reliable help in using these systems in the classroom. Additionally, the Future Farmers of America (FFA) and 4-H (head, heart, hands, health) school ag programs are interested as well.

This spring, I have spoken to 10 different classes of high-school and middle-school students. They are wildly enthusiastic about this type of innovative farming. They can view it as entrepreneurs, since they can innovatively farm in a small space super efficiently. They see it as futuristic, since NASA is currently doing experiments in hydroponic food production.

Industry Collaborations

The camaraderie in the Aquaponics Association is great. The membership is inexpensive (\$60). The conferences are fun and informative. I attended my first

conference in 2017 and have maintained business and personal relationships from that conference ever since. That trend has continued at every conference, even through the online versions. The next conference is in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in fall 2023. The tours will include Santa Fe Community College, a leader in controlled environment agriculture, including aquaponics. Santa Fe Community College is completely solar powered, and they grow algae for biofuels and dietary supplements, just to give you an idea of their level of forward thinking and innovation.

At the 2022 conference, I made

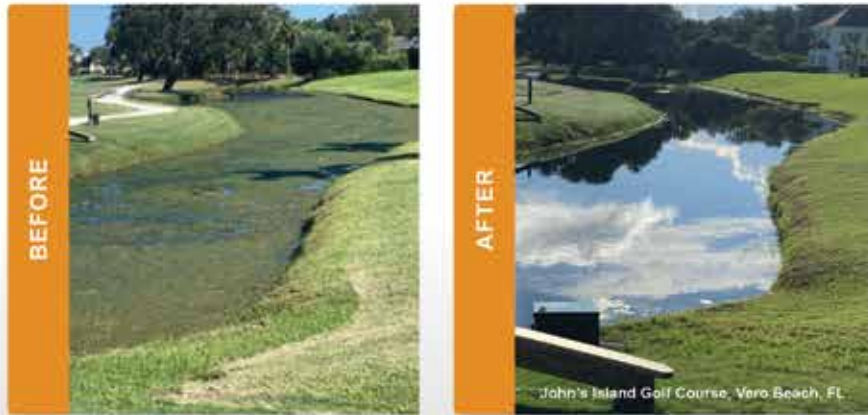


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School system (top and left) use aquaponics to teach water quality and STEM. Basil (above, right) is produced in a home system.

friends with T.C., who operates Veterans Produce, a non-profit organization that does job training and food production with veterans. I met Mac in 2017, and he uses aquaponics for raising food in prisons. Cameron is at the University of the Virgin Islands doing research and raising lettuce and tilapia on a commercial-scale farm. I also have the opportunity to do business at the aquaponics conferences (in between making friends).

So, if you need a new area to explore or a new business opportunity, I suggest that you check out this emerging industry. It has a lot to offer, with a lot of similarities to the water garden industry that we all enjoy. <https://aquaponicsassociation.org/>



About the Author

Ken Rust has managed ponds, lakes and water features for 24 years, specializing in design and installation of aeration equipment. His aquatic career began in 1994 after graduating in fisheries and aquaculture from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. His latest venture is Enterprise Aquatics LLC, which provides high-quality, science-based aquaponics systems and supplies. Ken enjoys giving talks on pond management and aquaponics, cooking, playing the fiddle and gardening, while raising five daughters with his wife Brooke in Baton Rouge.



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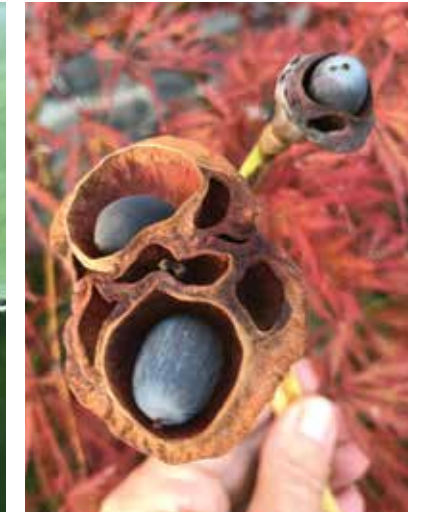
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Menyanthes trifoliata (bog bean) offers a fresh perspective with her reflection.



New iris cultivars (left) offer structural height and new colors without problematic seeding. Pay attention to the subtle surprises (middle) lotus can present. With abundant lotus cultivars (right), flower shapes, colors and even seed pods have new characteristics.

| Nature Calls |

Stop, Look & Listen

Get inspired by plant world romanticism

by Kelly Billing,

Water Becomes a Garden

I had the good fortune of spending a majority of my childhood in the forest. My mother was an avid gardener. We lived at the edge of a reservoir that supplied water to Baltimore City. That meant we had miles of fire trails to follow and discover.

Childhood Wonders

There were castle ruins that had belonged to two sisters from England, as the story goes. When clarity allowed, the bridge over the reservoir was an eagle view of a once thriving town under

water. A candy and ice cream store were just a couple of miles away through the woods. Swift passage on a banana-seat bicycle made for a great day as long as you were home before the dinner bell with no remnant evidence that you had gone that far.

Our mother had a way about her that made every discovery on the forest floor an event worth remembering. From fallen trees filled with termites to the first sign of May apples, we were indoctrinated on the ways of nature. Plant identification came along the way — partridge berry, crowfoot, bloodroot, Jack-in-the-Pulpits among the dogwood, oak and redbud, to name a few, came with discussions of where they might prosper in the

Lotus petals double as small boats for friendly inhabitants.



Clustering plants together (above, left) can have a higher impact, especially for *Zephyranthes candida* (rain lily). Lotus leaves (above, right) are a perfect looking glass sometimes. Placement is important (below, left) and can provide a window for sunlight to change the scenery or deliver a spotlight. Capitalize on delicately complex but understated color shifts (below, middle & right).

garden and how to effectively provide for their survival. Failure was often a good teacher, as the only knowledge at that time was what was handed down from previous generations. Google was nonexistent — just Encyclopedia Britannica in our house!

During difficult times in our lives, our mother would point to events we had been witness to that offered hope, renewal and faith that all things would be good in the end, no matter how bad they seemed at the time. Nature was

always compensating, adjusting and teaching the realities of living alongside her. Humanity was often explained — death and life, pain and happiness, destruction and renewal and, of course, spring cleaning.

Mother Nature has her own way of reflecting what we do, or we reflect her. One good storm could clean the dead wood out of the forest in a few hours, providing nurture for the insects, fungi and bacteria along with safe harbor among the fallen brush and branches for

small mammals and birds. What served a purpose yesterday may serve a new one today or tomorrow. Storms always pass, and the sky clears to be blue again. Her infinite wisdom was priceless.

Wisdom of the Wild

We grew to learn that we could find answers from nature, and storytelling was an integral part of how to approach and understand the world. Plants have stories. Knowing and sharing them was of value. My grandfather was of few



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Nature's ability to predict things wasn't dependent on a date on the calendar. She knew the schedule on her own clock, always adjusting and shifting to accommodate the cyclical changes. If you were paying attention, she was talking to you, too.

words, but I learned early that there were no crappie to be caught in the Susquehanna River if the dogwoods had finished blooming, and no shad if the shad bushes (serviceberry) were spent. Skunk cabbage announces the coming of spring. Nature's ability to predict things wasn't dependent on a date on the calendar. She knew the schedule on her own clock, always adjusting and shifting to accommodate the cyclical changes. If you were paying attention, she was talking to you, too.

I was blessed to have many mentors who furthered the value of plants in the landscape. Kurt Bluemel was among the first. He became known as "The King of Grasses" but not without investing himself wholeheartedly. Grasses were not used in the American landscape when he came to this country. By his own observations, he learned the importance of sound and movement in the landscape. Grasses provided both. Round bushes planted along the foundation of a home did little to attract attention, but they were common in front of most homes at that time. In a time when most homeowners wanted flowering plants to replace the bushes, ornamental grasses were a hard sell. Many things led to his success, but most important was his ability to see what others did not and teach it passionately.

He once told me that every plant has a piece of romanticism. When you find it, you will be able to market that plant. It may be the way the sun comes through the foliage at dawn and illuminates the leaves, or the way the color changes as the sun moves around it throughout the day. Sometimes it was how the dew settled on the tips of the hairs that line the leaf stem after a foggy night. Other times it would be the rustling of the

dried leaves in late fall that gently kept you company on a breezy afternoon. He saw those things and capitalized on them, forever changing the way garden plants were utilized together.

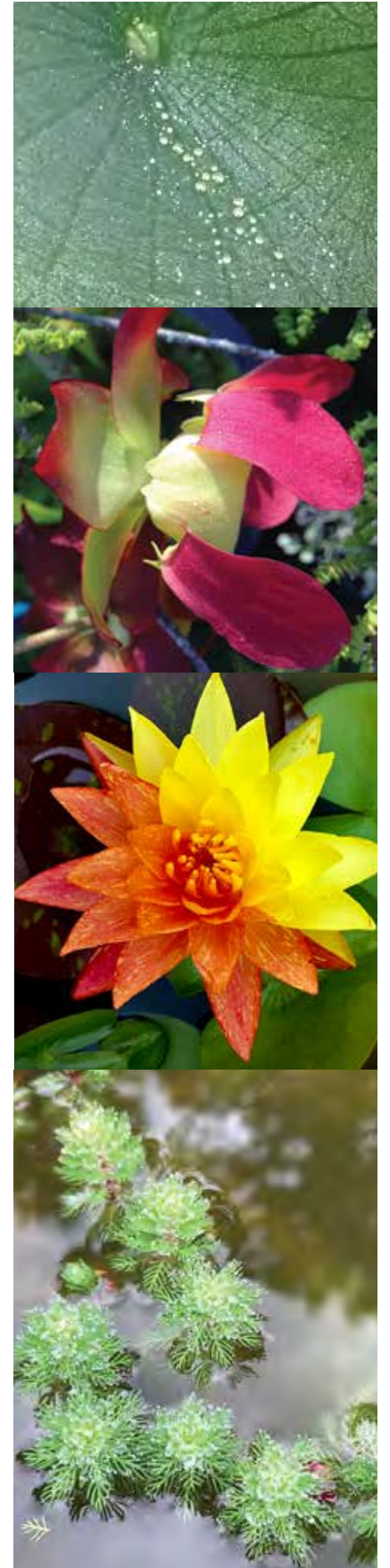
A Purpose for Every Plant

Truly learning a plant presented an opportunity to know how to use it in the landscape in the most effective way. Visual interest is to be capitalized on year-round. Trees or vines with interesting bark should be placed outside a window to set a framework and add structure to the winter landscape. Plants with curious dried stems and seed pods should be intentionally massed alongside them to collect snow for added appeal.

Each season should have an event to look forward to — not just in flowers, but in a story. Bulbs that emerge as the winter snow melts tell us that spring is coming. Fragrant plants, whose flowers may not be obvious, should peak in spring or fall when their sweet smell is most likely to coincide with the windows being open or when outdoor activities would be ongoing. Summer is hot and requires an element of surprise while the rest of the plants are slowing down and growing weary.

In gardening and in the landscape, the learning does not end. It mutates much like nature. As wisdom is collected, the plant combinations and likely partners are paired some-

From top to bottom: Make it fun and flick a dew-covered leaf! Sarracenia flowers replicate lanterns, and the seed pods persist for extended periods. Nymphaea 'Wanvisa' is consistent in her inconsistencies. Flower colors change randomly. Myriophyllum (parrot feather) collects dew drops sparkling in the morning sun.



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times intentionally; other times, nature decides. Plants will take up residence in the garden where they want to be by migrating around on their own. Often a good, healthy garden invites wildlife, and they often bring gifts of seeds and other wanted and unwanted guests. The garden will also be a place of safe harbor for its inhabitants. The beauty of mutation is part of the game.

Education Continues

When I began my water gardening career, it was very accidental; however, I had a sound foundation of inspiration. Aquatic plants became my focus, because we always had a small pond, and all these new and exciting plants fueled my curiosity. Since a school for water plants was nonexistent, it was a learn-on-your-own endeavor.

Anthony Archer-Wills was my light-bulb moment! His unwavering love of water and its inhabitants was so inspirational I got hooked. He is the master of design, reflection and replicating nature in every detail. His

understanding of the natural world and stories are why I'm here.

Patrick Nutt from Longwood Gardens taught about soils and fertilizers. Rolf Nelson from Nelson Water Gardens understood pests and disease. Ken Landon from the International Waterlily Collection provided extra lilies here and there that were on an ever-growing wish list. Letters, visits and phone calls went back and forth among the water garden community. The International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society (IWGS) had Walter Pagels, the organization's librarian who was committed to sharing his experiences, knowledge and occasional plants he had acquired from around the world. Photocopies of individual plant profiles fulfilled an unwavering thirst for aquatic plant knowledge. These are but a few of the influential contributors that shared their own visions, perspectives and understandings.

Mentors are the storytellers who inspire the next generation. The collective knowledge of knowing plants throughout their lifetime is what trans-

fers to the next animate mind. Decades of observation, experimentation, success and failures can't be replicated by a machine or a program — at least not yet.

So, be sure you are listening! 🗣️

About the Author

Kelly Billing

owns Water Becomes a Garden. She is a grower and consultant with a focus on creative, site appropriate use of aquatic plants for effective display. Attention is given to seasonal interest, nutrient uptake and ecological balance to meet project goals. Steeped in water quality research, she promotes the use of natural processes. Her clients across the country allow her to make a difference on projects through proper planning and planting.



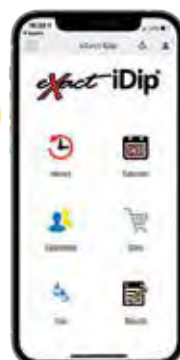
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Carnivorous plants (left) patiently lure in their prey. Bumblebees (right) sleep warm and dry inside temperature-regulating lotus flowers.



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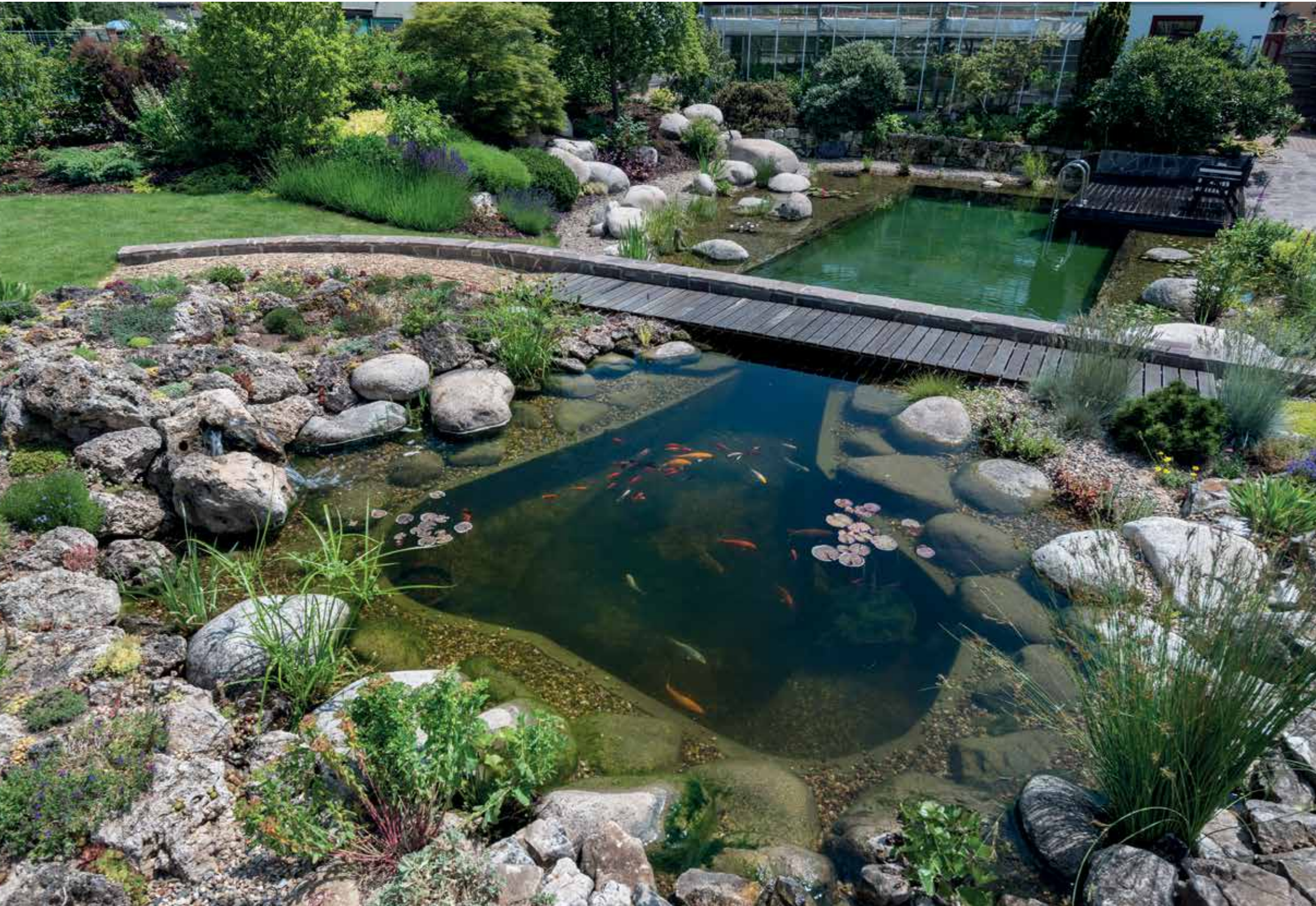
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The Common ESSENTIALS

Considerations for natural
swimming pools and
recreational ponds

by **Frayne McAtee,**
Atlantic-OASE

As the interest and popularity of natural swimming pools (NSP) and recreational ponds continues to grow in North America, we see an increase in questions about how they work, what products are recommended and what should be thought about when designing them.

One of the first questions that often comes up is, “What is the difference between an NSP and a recreational pond?” In our industry there is a variety of opinions and ideas as to what defines a natural swimming pond and a recreational pond. The intent of this article is to continue and add to the conversation about this exciting and growing category — not to tell anyone the right or wrong way to do anything. The more we work together to discuss topics like these, the better off the

This natural swimming pool and koi pond actually comprise one large feature; however, separating them makes it easier to adapt the best filtration package for each system.



An important part of a well designed NSP is to provide safe ways to enter and leave (ingress and egress) the feature. Additionally, all surfaces in these areas must offer good traction to prevent slips and falls.

category and the more satisfied our customers will be.

So, What's the Difference?

A straightforward way to answer this question is to determine how the feature will be used and how it will look. If a client wants to use the feature like a swimming pool and have a non-chemical natural solution, I would call it a natural swimming pond. If the client wants to have a feature that looks more

like a traditional pond or water garden, and swimming is not a key element, I would call it a recreational pond. An NSP will have some of the common characteristics of a traditional pool, like a defined swim area and safe ways to enter and leave the feature (ingress and egress). Having these characteristics will make the feature look different from a traditional pond.

Our company is involved with a variety of trade organizations and

common interest groups around the world that support the growth and advancement of the NSP category. One of the common threads that runs through these organizations is the goal to expose more people to the features and benefits NSPs. Another goal is to provide general best practices and guidelines, which can help installers and clients benefit from the expertise and past experience of people that have successfully worked in this cate-



This NSP has a defined swim area, biological filtration in the upflow regeneration (bog) area located around the swim area, and a mechanical filtration system conveniently located under the swim deck at the back of the image.

gory for many years.

Guiding the Conversation

Recently the International Organization for Natural Bathing Waters (IOB) and the Association for Swimming Pond and Natural Swimming Pools (ASPNSP) have published The Common Essentials in planning, building and maintaining NSPs.

The Common Essentials is a helpful tool in guiding the conversation about

NSPs. NSPs are nature-based solutions, engineered systems that use principles and processes known from nature. To clarify and purify water, NSPs use exclusively mechanical and biological methods to reduce nutrients.

Each NSP is the result of a professional implementation of the customer's request and planning process based on scientific approaches and state-of-the-art technology. The resulting plan describes the water-treatment process

and predicts excellent bathing water quality. When the NSP is in operation, the planned water-treatment process must meet prediction and expectation on water quality.

The Common Essentials goes on

The girls (bottom, left) enjoy their NSP. NSPs can be designed to fit seamlessly (bottom, middle) into any landscape. The separation of the swimming area (bottom, right) and koi pond. While this may look like a single water feature it is actually two separate features — an NSP and a koi pond.





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As with most water features, illumination is an important tool to help make the NSP enjoyable and beautiful both during the day and at night.

to say that clients should be informed about all the aspects of an NSP, including maintenance, especially with respect to what is to be expected in

testing regulations are to be followed. Private NSPs are to be tested as needed. When plants are used, native plants are preferred. Plants deemed to be

Whatever type or style of feature is chosen, it is especially important to understand the client's expectations and match them up with the best products and practices available to ensure that the result is to everyone's satisfaction.

terms of living water quality and the presence of wildlife. Existing applicable building and construction regulations must be followed. This applies as well to all safety regulations existing for swimming pools.

An NSP is divided into a bathing area or areas, and a biological treatment area or areas. Surface water runoff from the property surrounding the NSP shall not flow into the NSP. An NSP must be sealed, i.e., isolated from the ground under and around the NSP. Materials used in NSPs should not pollute or contaminate the water and environment. This also includes limiting the introduction of phosphorous.

During the planning process, the water that will be used to fill the NSP should be evaluated and adjusted as needed. For public NSPs, local water-

invasive species in the locale where the NSP is located are not to be used. Plants used in an NSP should be cultivated for that purpose and not be harvested from nature.

After reading The Common Essentials, I think that many will agree that they are common sense and best practices that many professionals already incorporate into their business.

What About Fish?

One of the questions that comes up after reviewing The Common Essentials is, "What about fish in an NSP?" While swimming with fish in a pond is enjoyed by many people and is happening every day, this can also be a contentious issue for others.

I think that the question should be, "What is the best way to allow a client

that wants to enjoy swimming in natural chemical-free water and also keep and enjoy fish?" One answer is to design two separate systems that are visually one natural feature. Separating the systems allow us to filter and maintain them differently and, in the long term, make for a natural, healthy, easy-to-maintain feature.

Whatever type or style of feature is chosen, it is especially important to understand the client's expectations and match them up with the best products and practices available to ensure that the result is to everyone's satisfaction.

For more information on The Common Essentials and to learn more about the IOB and the ASPNSP, please check out www.iob-ev.com/en/ and www.aspnsp.org/home.html.

About the Author

Frayne McAtee is VP of Business Development at Atlantic-OASE and has more than 30 years of experience in the water feature, lake management and fountain industry. Born and raised in Washington State, he currently lives in the Seattle area.





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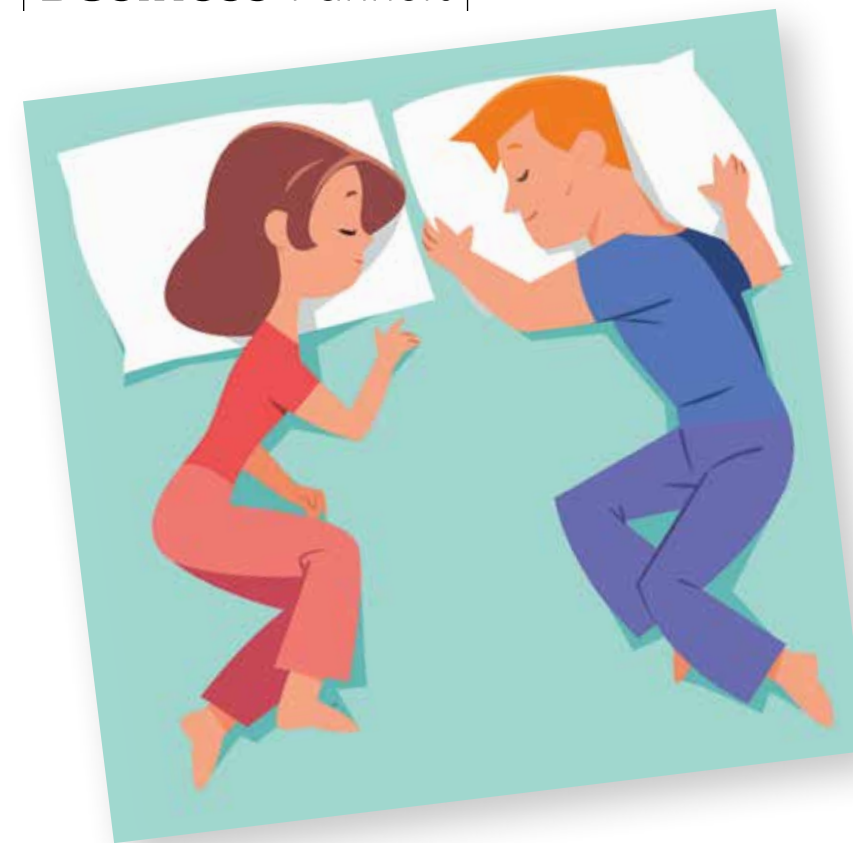
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Sleeping with the Enemy?

How to run a business with your spouse

by **Barbi Holdeman,**
The Pond Gnome

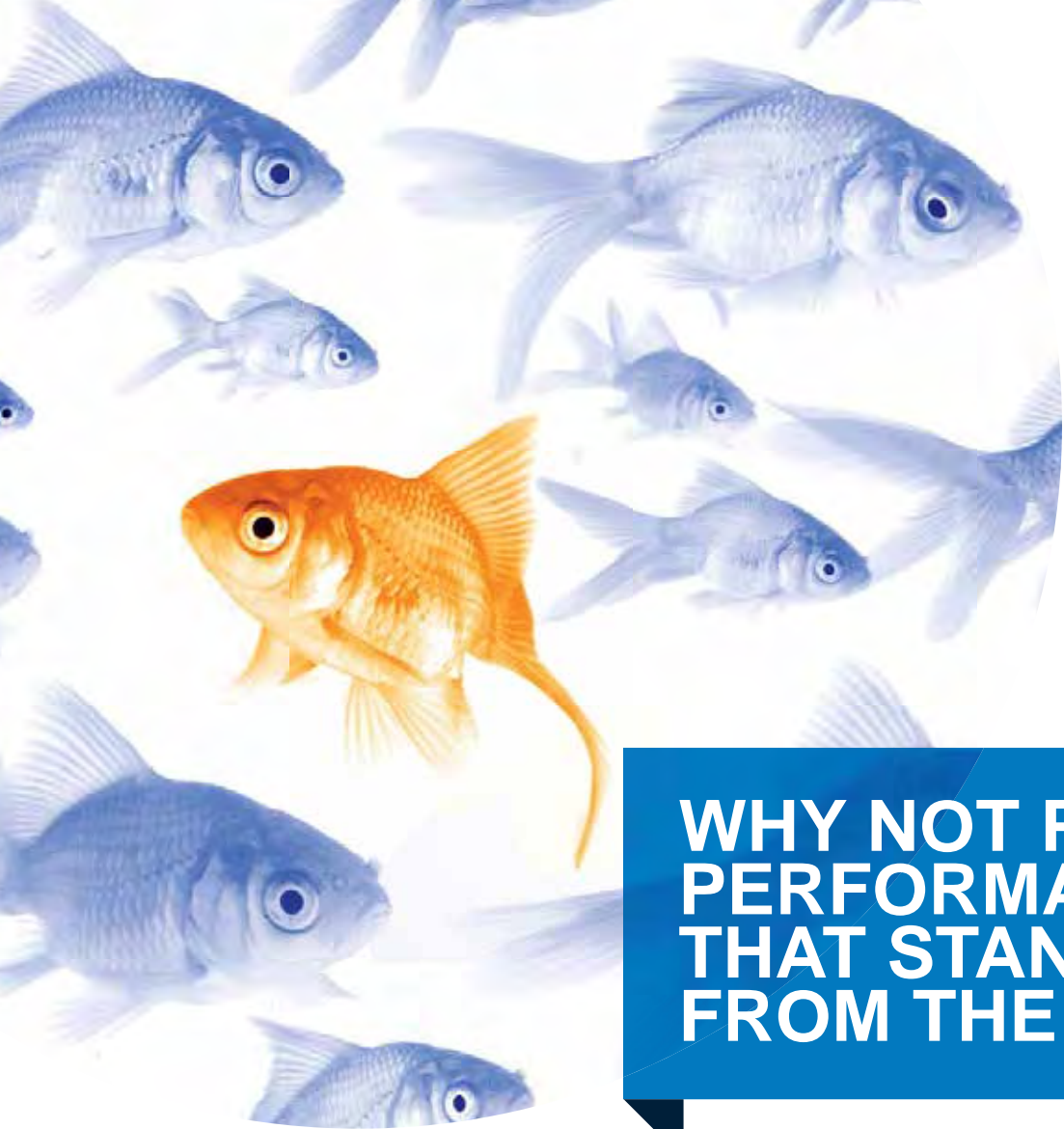
If you have a perfect relationship with your spouse in your personal life and in running your business without any animosity, resentment, conflict or issues, you can stop reading now. But if you run a “ma-and-pa” business working with your spouse or significant other, can we talk?

Humble Beginnings

When my husband Paul and I launched The Garden Gnome over 20 years ago, we were a full-service landscape design-build company. To get away from my 9-to-5 job and to be able to stay at home to raise our son, who was 2 years old at the time, I decided to turn his hobby into a profitable business — not an easy task for a variety of reasons!

Originally, my duties included answering the phone at any time of day or night, because that’s how you get business, right? I also dealt with clients and potential clients who would show up at our front door at any time of day or night with questions, comments, concerns, ideas or just to visit. Oy!

I also did all the drawings, because I had a bit of education in that area. We spent weekends marketing at public events, most of the time dragging our toddler along because we didn’t have anyone to baby-sit. So, we juggled the toddler and the public. (And, yes, we used his cuteness shamelessly to attract attention.) These events included garden tours, home shows, public speaking engagements, networking events, hangouts out at a nursery display pond, and anywhere else we could get in front of people, because we were operating on a shoestring budget, and guerilla marketing was all we could afford.



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Barbi (top, left) works from the original home office — the living room) (2001). Paul built his first waterfall (top, right) in his father's tiny backyard (2000). Paul & Barbi (left) have received many industry accolades over the years.

I did the bookkeeping, payroll, taxes and any other task associated with the administration of a business. We couldn't afford any kind of professional help, so I had to research what needed to be done and then make it all happen. Paul spent 10 to 12 hours a day building with a handful of whatever guys we could get to show up each day, and then ran all over town evenings and weekends tap-dancing for potential clients to get new work. The business (along with our son) grew slowly and steadily.

Leap of Faith

After about three struggling years, we made the leap of faith to launch The Pond Gnome, specializing in organic ecosystem water features, and left full-blown landscape design and builds behind. It was almost like starting over, and we began the whole process all over again. Again, the business (and our son) grew.

Eventually, we were able to hire a certified public accountant, which helped tons and took some of the more complicated work off my plate. We eventually decided that we had to set boundaries for answering the phone and accepting client visits to our home.

During the first 10 years, I worked as a silent partner, meaning that no one else in the industry really knew I existed. I was just the wife who did Paul's books and answered his phone. It's not that I wanted to be the company figurehead — heaven forbid! — but I got a little irritated when suppliers and clients continually

offered goodies, rewards, lunches and the like to Paul while I felt chained to my desk running the business.

At about 13 years, I needed the situation to change, and I finally managed to convince Paul that if we were going to be a real business, we needed to be seen as The Pond Gnome so that someday we could sell the business and retire. This was a long road that lasted a few years. Hiring our first business coach in 2016 and learning how to systemize our business was a huge leap in that direction.

We still have some older clients who demand to speak to Paul instead of our service manager, but what are you going to do? We've come a long way over the past 23 years with the help of several different business coaches, all who had their own specialty to impart to our growing company. Paul is now the CEO, and I am the COO of a \$1 million-plus company, and our son (now 25) is also a big part of our company. All's well that ends well, right?

Steal the Show

If you're sitting at a desk all day, saying "Oh, poor me, nobody appreciates what I do," stop it! All that does is foster resentment and make you bitchy, which makes people less likely to want to be

around you, and the cycle perpetuates itself. I'll admit, I was guilty of this.

The solution? Find your passion. Find a part of the business that you like and that you're good at. Then, promote yourself in that area. If you're awesome at social media, sign your work! If you run the website and blogs, make sure there's an author's biography online so that people know it's you. If you like being in front of the camera, do the videos and vlogs! If you enjoy being in the background doing the nitty-gritty detail stuff, embrace it and own it.

Most of all, be honest with yourself. If you're feeling under-appreciated and it's making you crabby, do some soul searching to find out what you really want out of the business and out of life. Then, go after it. You have the power.

Can You Hear Me Now?

Oh, yeah, this is a toughie! We're partners, we're spouses, we're parents, we're sons, we're daughters, we're sisters, we're brothers ... and we tend to let all that get mixed up in the same conversation sometimes.

You're out to dinner on date night talking about the kids, and suddenly business comes up. That's natural, as it's part of your life. You're in the office and your kid calls or comes in whining about something — the business conversation

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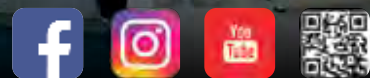
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just got flushed. You two are having a meeting, and your husband's fantasy football team co-coach calls or texts with a trade offer, and he answers it! Or, your bestie calls you with her drama of the day, and you answer it! Any of this ring a bell?

If you guys aren't communicating, the entire business tends to break down. Employees get confused because they're being told different things by different people. Marketing can stall out because no one is making a decision. Clients take advantage of the "he said, she said" scenario, because one or both of you doesn't know what's going on with that particular issue. You need to treat each other as partners and set aside time to communicate as such without distraction. You wouldn't let a friend or relative or child interrupt a meeting with a client, would you? Then don't let outside distractions interrupt a meeting with your business partner. Set up a time (daily, weekly, etc.) that works for both of you and put it on the calendar! It's a meeting. Period. Write up an

agenda with bullet points that need to be covered. During that time, treat each other as business partners and equals. (Save the sexual innuendo for later when you're back to being in the spouse roles.)

Let's not forget the other half of the equation: your marriage. You must take time to be partners, to let go of the pressures and stress of business, and to focus on each other. This is not always easy, but neither is divorce. If you need to find a good marriage counselor to help you get things on track, do it. Your relationship with each other permeates and filters down through every single aspect of your company. It affects your employees, your clients and your management team. If you are working the business together, then you two are the business and its culture.

Divide & Conquer

Paul and I found that we work pretty well together, especially if we each have our own "territories." We consult on pretty much everything, but some areas

are his to manage, and some are mine. For example, I take care of the inside of the house, and he takes care of the landscape and garden. If there's a big decision and expense, we talk about it; otherwise, we just get things done. Not every little thing has to be decided by a committee.

Likewise, in our business, I don't try to tell him how to build a pond, and he doesn't tell me how to do the daily administrative work. (In fact, he'd really rather not know!) We learned a long time ago that this company needs both of us, or at least both of our roles in the business (i.e., both halves of the whole). That's not to say that you shouldn't know something about the other's job in case of an emergency, but it might help the business — and your relationship — to get out of each other's way.

Set Boundaries

If you're one of those couples who do everything together, kudos to you! We're not. You have to find out what works for you. If you need to set bound-

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Barbi (left) adds signs to the wall of the new construction yard (2015). Parker (right) joins the construction team after high school (2016).

aries, do it. Go with your strengths, and let the other half help with your weaknesses (yes, you have to admit that you have them). Never be ashamed to ask for help. It's a lot less painful than needing to be rescued.

Also set boundaries with clients! Keep regular hours and stick to them. Don't allow your clients to run your schedule or your life. Some people think that because they're your client, they're also your friend — not really. Friends and family members often feel like they can call you any time of day or night with their trade-related questions, which is simply impolite. With clients, you can be professional but firm in setting boundaries. With friends and family, you might just have to live with it, unless you have the kind of relationship where you can be blunt.

Boundaries absolutely need to be set with clients. You cannot allow them to constantly interrupt your life outside work hours and expect to sustain your sanity. If they call outside designated work hours, let it go to voicemail. They'll figure it out. If they show up at your house unannounced, politely explain that you're in the middle of a family activity (even if you're just sitting around in your undershirt watching football). You have to maintain the line between client and friend. Once blurred, it can continue incrementally and actually end relationships.

Pull Your Own Weight

Feel like a nag sometimes? Yeah, me, too. This is a very difficult subject. No one enjoys nagging — no, seriously, no one. But if you feel your spouse is slacking, you feel compelled to say something, right? So, bite your sarcastic tongue and try to find out why first. Maybe they're having a brain freeze, and a little help and compassion from you could propel them past it. Or maybe they just flat-out forgot that something needed to be done. Or maybe they actually have a good reason for putting something off that you aren't aware of. My point is to remember that you're married to, and sleep with, this person, so be gentle with your words.

Finally, leave work at work. This is huge! (And it's probably the most difficult hurdle.) If you hope to have a happy marriage, this needs to happen once in a while. Yes, the business is part of your lives, but your marriage was there first. Remember that time? Take time to be spouses and parents and friends and neighbors. Take time to recharge your batteries. Take time for a hobby. You and the business will be better for it.

In summary, if you are unhappy with your role in the company, change it. If you want more involvement, take it. But be careful what you wish for! Spend some time on a little self-reflection and decide what you really want: more credit, more attention, more money,

more time with your family, more time for hobbies or charity work, etc. Once you're honest with yourself about what you want, then you'll be comfortable with whatever decision you make. Then it's time to have an open, honest conversation with your partner about what each of you wants out of the business, life and your marriage. Sleep well! ☺

About the Author

Originally from St. Louis, Missouri, **Barbi Holdeman** migrated to Phoenix in 1977 in an old station wagon with her mother, grandmother, six cats and two gerbils. She attended Central High School, obtaining her GED so that she could strike out on her own at the ripe old age of 16. She's a bit on the independent and rebellious side.

Barbi has completed the Maricopa County Master Gardener training courses and has an Associate's Degree in Ornamental Horticulture & Landscape Design, a Paralegal Certificate and an Associate Degree in Fashion Design and Apparel Construction. She also speaks fluent sarcasm. As co-owner and administrator of The Pond Gnome, Barbi concentrates her energies on promotion, administration and comic relief.





The secret to keeping stunning tancho, sanke and showa is, it's all in their water.

Koi Pond Wisdom

Lessons learned from keeping koi over 20 years

by **Mark Gibson,**
Green Thumb

I live in Arkansas. In the surrounding 50-mile radius of my home, there are a few hundred fish farmers that mainly raise rosy reds, comets, koi and carp. I have noticed that carp that have some color are affectionately called Japanese koi. Interestingly, they mainly raise them for bait unless some unwitting newbie pond owner wants to overload their pond just after having it built.

I have also been to the Niigata prefecture in Japan two times. What's the difference Arkansas and Niigata? Both have muddy

holes where they feed and grow the fish. Both feed frequently during the warm weather, and not so much in the winter. Both have issues with predators that constantly consume or kill their valuable fish. However, in the fall, people travel to these areas for different reasons. In Arkansas, they go to duck hunt. In Japan, people from all over the world flock to the different breeders where the water is clear, and the living jewels they have bred are displayed and sold to anxious buyers.

Do the farmers in Arkansas have well constructed greenhouses that display minnows or carp? Of course not. The Japanese do have well built or overbuilt buildings that see customers come in, who buy and leave.

What makes this area grow such colorful fish? It is the water that trickles down and minerals that are in that particular area.

What makes their koi better than koi in Arkansas? Several factors actually contribute to the amazing colors and confirmation of the fish.

Trickle-Down Aquaculture

If you have not been to Japan, the Niigata prefecture is a mountainous region where people build ponds, houses and gardens on every imaginable hillside. Earthquakes push millions of tons of soil upward, creating mountains of soft soils that can come tumbling down any minute.

But wait, what makes this area grow such colorful fish? It is the water that trickles down and minerals that are in that particular area. I have noticed that on one side of a mountain, gorgeous platinum and yamabuki (yellow) koi are grown. On the other side of the mountain, koi with intense red and black markings make incredible Sanke and



I had to visually inspect all the fish that would come home with me from Japan.

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My favorite type of drain is a well plumbed under-gravel filter (UGF) system. This one is 55 x 75 feet and required over 4,000 drilled holes.

Showa koi. These minerals combined with exceptional, soft water from the surrounding hills help the Japanese breeders continually create and maintain blood lines of fish that are sought after the world over.

Skip forward a few months, and these special fish are shipped globally

to koi sellers. Anxious koi enthusiasts then purchase these specimens for their pond and hope to maintain or accentuate their newfound pets. Will these new additions keep their color? Will they survive? Did they bring home some new virus or bacteria that will decimate the other fish in the pond? Why does

this happen? It's all in the water. Water quality is the issue.

Quality Control

When I was very young growing up my grandmother lived on a farm with a bayou. There were lots of fish that were plentiful for the taking if you had the time, a worm and fishing pole. The thrill of catching a 3-inch bream or catfish was always exciting. However, they never got large. The bayou was overstocked, and the water quality was poor. During the heat of the summer, there were large fish kills due to lack of oxygen in the water. The smell of ammonia was pervasive.

Skip ahead 40 years, and we now can control the oxygen levels in the pond, along with ammonia, pH, kH, gH and other water-quality parameters with better pond-construction

techniques. For instance, simply adding an aerator can increase oxygen levels in the hot weather from 3 to 4 parts per million to 9 to 10 parts per million. Low oxygen levels make fish weak and lethargic. Higher oxygen levels will keep the fish and beneficial bacteria healthy and growing.



UGFs can be plumbed for any sized pond. They cover the liner and look better than standard bottom drains.

Installing a better filter that is easy to maintain will keep the koi enthusiastic about their living jewels.

Getting into a well-designed pond that is easy to maintain is not necessarily easy on the wallet. But a poorly designed pond will almost certainly make maintenance a nightmare. In times past, green water was an issue. The addition of a properly sized UV light

will clear up the water in short order.

Other Key Factors

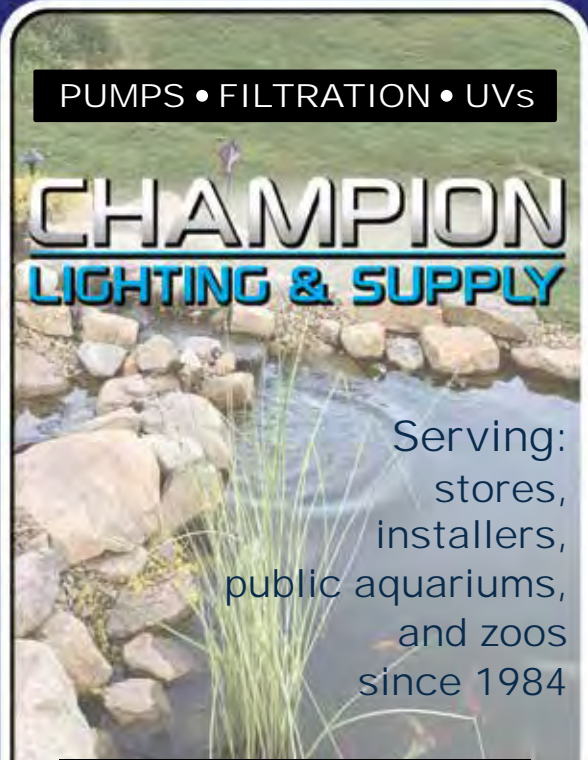
What about muddy water in a lined pond? There are two answers to that issue. An inexpensive filter with pads or sponges will not be hard on the pocketbook, but it will be maintenance heavy because the pads have to be washed frequently. A better solution is a backwash filter that contains a plastic media along with a blower that can agitate the internals. This will be more expensive in the short term. However, the media does not usually need to be replaced like the sponge pads. Prices vary for these filters. Generally, the consumer will be the judge of their investment, but the more spent on filtration, the easier maintenance and water clarity will become.

What about pumps? I sell both submersible and external motors. Submersibles are an inexpensive way to get water moving, while external motors generally last longer and are sometimes cheaper to operate.

This brings me to my pet peeve when building ponds. Do you use a bottom drain or design an under-gravel filter (UGF) grid? I have queried well known pond builders from all over the United States. E.T. from California likes both types of filtration depending on the customer. L.L. from California likes bottom drains but will put in UGFs. B.C. From Arizona likes UGFs hands down. M.T. From Texas likes UGFs. S.R. from New York has

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Hidden in Plain Sight

Gracefully concealing your filtration equipment

by Kent Wallace,
Living Water Solutions

Editor's note: This is a "flashback" article from January/February 2016 — a great topic worthy of another look. Kent will be back with a new article in the September/October issue.

To be efficient, pond filtration equipment is usually installed as close to the pond as possible. Hiding these parts can be as creative an endeavor as building the pond itself. Many times the ability to hide equipment in plain sight aesthetically makes or breaks a pond's appearance. Customers want to see the pond — not what makes it operate. Skimmers, settlement tanks, prefilters, biofilters, UV lights and pumps are all types of equipment that can be hidden to great effect.

Hiding Skimmers

Skimmers used on ponds are usually larger than the skimmers used in pool construction. However, many pool-type skimmers are also used on ponds. All skimmers have relatively unappealing covers — especially when incorporated into the landscape design or a formal edge pond. Skimmers that come with lids are obviously plastic in appearance, which leads most pond builders to use a flat stone instead. It's fairly easy to wrap around the skimmer with decorative rock, but the lid is the real problem.

One solution is to screw thin lath to the surface with stainless steel screws and apply a cementitious faux coating onto it. This takes technique and time but is well worth the effort. A redwood or faux wood lid also works well and weighs less.

SERIES: Best Pond Practices

This is an installment of an ongoing, multi-part series. Be sure to watch for further installments in future issues!

Pool-type skimmers are usually smaller in footprint and easier to place a stone cover over, but another option for pool skimmers is a "Pouralid." Pouralid makes replacement skimmer lids for almost all swimming pool skimmers available. They look like an upside-down lid with a shallow cavity in the top, which can be filled with whatever cement-type deck material matches the surrounding deck. Virtually any faux finish can be poured and formed in the cavity, making them a good choice when used in formal installations.

Tanks and Prefilters

Settlement tanks and in-ground prefilters are a little more



Faux rocks provide the perfect cover for a filtration system.



This skimmer lid is covered with lath and a cementitious finish.



UV lights and filters can be hidden together.



These yamabuki will keep looking good if the water quality is kept up. In Japan, water quality is constantly monitored.

never put in a UGF but does not like the idea of all the debris in the gravel, so he likes bottom drains. B.T. From North Carolina likes UGFs as well.

Here in Arkansas, I've had several ponds with passive bottom drains that continually get stopped up from pine needles, oak tree leaves and hickory nuts. Since meeting Mike White at a Helix

summit in California, I started putting in UGFs with much better success in keeping water clear and not having to clean the pond yearly. White states that he has not had to clean his pond in over 20 years. The gravel looks great, the water is clear, and the fish are healthy.

Granted, bottom drains are easier and cheaper to install, but a well designed UGF with a properly sized motor will keep the bottom cleaner with less maintenance than a bottom drain. My customers with bottom drains here have to annually drain the ponds and suck out the debris from the lines going under the liner. Why go to all that trouble? What customers want is beautiful fish, clear water and easily maintained life support or filter systems.

The last pond build I did was 55 feet by 75 feet. The pond is 3 feet deep, and the water is clear. The surrounding area has pines and oaks that drop debris all year long, yet the pond is amazingly easy to maintain. That is what customers need and want! ☞

About the Author

Mark Gibson is a lifelong horticulturist. After he realized that chopping cotton was not the life he wanted, he went to college and earned a degree in computer science. He has been active in the retail garden space since 1974, when his family purchased a small garden center with the Green Thumb moniker. In 1995, he started a retail division devoted to ponds, fish and water plants. He is an enthusiastic gardener who, along with his sister, owns and operates Arkansas' only exclusive water garden center. They have a combined 80 years of retail, horticultural and aquatic experience.



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This pump is hidden in a landscape valve box.

difficult to conceal because of their inherent size. Ranging from 2 to 4 feet in diameter, a stone cover is very difficult and heavy. The few lids available for these larger filter tanks are usually just plain, unattractive plastic. To transform these original lids, they can be cut in sections and faux rocked, or a portion of the lid can be left off altogether if it's on the back side, away from view. A hinged redwood lid is another good option. Raised ponds with the settlement tanks located close by or attached to the pond are always more visible than tanks placed in-ground. The hinged lid can be part of the pond's edge or used as a deck area since occasional access is all that's necessary.

Cutting the center out of the original lid and creating a vented, domed cover is another way to change the look. Vented lids are important because gases can build up inside the tank, creating a smelly situation. Shade cloth comes in a variety of colors, and making a frame and attaching it to the edge of the original lid is time-consuming but doable. A stone finish can be used to camouflage an existing lid, and always remember to vent it to allow the gases to escape. Additionally, the vent creates an easy hand grab for removal when servicing. A raised pool for a water garden or planter can be constructed over part of the tank as long as there is enough room left for easy access to the prefilter or rotating micro-screen inside it. If a small pool area with plants is built over the tank, a 2-inch drain in the bottom with a threaded plug makes for easy cleaning, flowing directly into the settlement tank.

Biofilters – The Natural Equipment

Concealing biofilters is where the pond industry has always shined. In the early years, Aquascape introduced the concept of the open waterfall filter, and from that point on our industry has been hiding biofilters inside waterfalls. It is fairly easy because these filters are usually installed above water level, and surrounding them with the rocks, boulders and landscape material to blend them into the landscape is a natural solution. Currently almost every pond filter manufacturer has their own version of a waterfall filter. Many of these come with a spill or weir made of plastic that is unattractive and unnatural-looking. It's relatively easy to cut off the spill, leaving just the clamping section for the liner or polyurea. This allows the waterfall and spill rocks to be built right up to the filter's face for a more natural look.

Waterfall filters generally don't need complete access like settlement tanks do, so it's easy to cover the front half and build over the top with rocks and plants. A shallow planter covering half of the top is a good way to soften the look of a waterfall, allowing succulents or ground cover treatments to flow down around the falls.

Lights, Pumps, Action!

External pumps and UV lights are probably the hardest to hide. External



This pond (top) sits over a settlement tank. Waterfalls (bottom) make wonderful covers.

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pumps need to be placed in an efficient location between pond and filters. If necessary they can be placed in a large, in-ground landscape valve box or in a box built specifically for them. Fake rocks of hollow plastic can also be used. Any pump box lid or cover should be vented and fake rocks should have holes put in them as vents for a constant flow of cooling air.

Freestanding, large-diameter UV lights can be placed on a slab behind the filters or tubular types can be mounted off the ground, but it's always a challenge. The electrical portion and power supply must always be located off the ground to prevent moisture contamination. I have modified several single-tube lights for downflow capability so they could be mounted inside a biofilter with the electrical portion above the waterline. This works well if the biofilter is deep enough to allow for it. UV lights can also be buried in the ground, with the electrical portion and bulb access above ground for accessibility.

Put those finishing touches on a build by getting creative, and you can make your equipment covers as beautiful and high-quality as the pond itself. ☺

About the Author

Kent Wallace

was born and raised in Las Vegas. He spent most of his adult life in the automobile industry at independent shops and dealerships. Then, in 2001, a neighbor asked Kent if he could build her a koi pond like the one Kent's father had.



From that point on, pond building became his new passion. That first pond he built was submitted to Better Homes & Gardens magazine and won Best Courtyard Nationwide in their special-interest publication.

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Chuck Gillem, HNA 2022 Attendee
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Cheers to our 2022 Water Artisans of the Year



Landon Malave

LCM Waterfalls & Ponds

"This has been a culmination of dedication and hard work to accomplish something we have had our eyes set on since we started. So many people were involved in helping us to get here. We are deeply humbled and honored!"

Jonathan Marston

FallingWater Scapes

"Each year, I see so many beautiful water features built by our fellow colleagues in this industry. To have my work recognized among a growing group of talented peers is truly an honor. I'm grateful and humbled to have received this award."



Matt Hiner

Hiner Outdoor Living

"There are few art forms that take a team effort, and this award represents the years of hard work, passion and dedication that our team has done. To be recognized by our peers at this level is truly the best honor we could ask for. Thank you!"

Shane Hemphill & Heath Webb

Art of the Yard

"We are honored to receive this award from the pond community that we love being a part of. We couldn't do it without our Art of the Yard family."



Eric Arntson

Stonebridge Pond and Waterfall

"The whole team, especially the young 'Stonebridge Boys,' were thrilled to receive another Water Artisans of the Year award and be recognized among so many other talented artists. Thank you!"





Dates Announced for the 2023 Atlantic-OASE Professional Conference

The time has come to mark your calendars for the Atlantic-OASE Professional Conference! The annual three-day professional conference will take place Oct. 25 – 27, 2023.

Join us for another year of fun and water feature education in Cleveland, Ohio!

Follow us on social media or check out www.atlantic-oase.com/conference for the latest updates and registration information coming soon!

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Aquascape Inc. Embraces the Recreational Pond Trend with Kits and Training

Recreational ponds are the latest trend in outdoor living spaces. Traditional, chemically treated swimming pools are being replaced with water the way nature intended it to be. This means water that's naturally balanced and filtered, providing a healthier, sustainable environment for human interaction.

To meet this trend, Aquascape recently launched its new recreational pond kits that help to eliminate the guesswork of creating a living aquatic ecosystem. When properly designed and built, living water creates a unique environment that can be used 365 days a year.

Aquascape offers recreational pond kits in two sizes: 9' x 20' and 19' x 24'. In addition, Aquascape created an online training course at Aquascape University that covers everything you need to know about installing and maintaining recreational ponds.

Visit www.aquascapeinc.com/recreational-ponds for more information about recreational pond kits.

Visit www.aquascapeuniversity.com for information on the recreational ponds course.



Mark your Calendars - 2023 Your Pond Farm Trade Show on Thursday, Oct. 19

At this year's trade show, Your Pond Farm will be revealing what to expect for the upcoming season. There will be giveaways and so much more! Do not miss this educational event. There will be food trucks for your convenience. The show is open for contractors, wholesalers, dealers, garden centers and pet stores, but not to the general public. It will be held at Your Pond Farm located in Barto, Pennsylvania.

Your Pond Farm provides customers with a one-stop shopping and shipping experience for all their water-gardening needs. Customers can receive products right off Your Pond Farm's trucks to their doorstep or ship product from their new shipping facility. Your Pond Farm is a long-term innovator and specializes in internet fulfillment.

Sign up for the trade show today by calling 877/412-3276 or emailing sales@yourpondfarm.com.

You can also find Your Pond Farm online at www.yourpondfarm.com.



New Rusted Steel Fountain Takes You Back in Time

The new spouted Triple Corten Steel Rusted Fountain Urn Kit feels like rusty farm tools repurposed to adorn the garden with a twist. The tooled, 19th century aged-metal look of these corten weathered steel fountains is squared off into a modern industrial fountain design. A perpetual hand-me-down spillway falls brings both history and style together into one eye-catching triple fountain, fitting for either country or city settings. As always, Blue Thumb fountain kits come complete with molded basin, pump and plumbing for easy installation and minimal customer care. Show us what form your landscape plan takes with this fountain!

See it at www.shopbluethumb.com/triple-corten-steel-rusted-fountain-urn-kit.

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Fairfield Spring Koi Kick Off Event Recap

In March 2023, the Fitz's Fish Ponds team imported 50,000 tosaï from Japan! On April 1, 2023, the Fitz's Fish Ponds Fairfield Retail Store held a Spring Koi Kick Off Event to start the season off right! Although the weather was less than ideal in the morning, it did not sway any koi hobbyists from heading on over to our event! The first 50 customers to arrive received a free tosaï, and they went fast! Some dedicated customers arrived extra early to ensure their giveaway prize!

Throughout the day, there were hourly raffles with some amazing prizes. We started off with a \$200



retail gift card and FFP mug, a sponsored Microbe Lift package, a free summer pond cleaning, a nisai koi and finally a beautiful sansai koi! Congratulations to all of our winners and best of luck to the rest at Koi Fest this summer! The best part of the raffles is that our very special guest, Kosuke Saito of Shintaro Koi Farm, read them aloud each hour in English and Japanese! It was an honor to host Saito and have him help out with our event.

All About the Koi

This past winter, Fitz and the FFP Team brought in some of the highest quality koi from Japan, and those koi were featured at our event! Fairfield Store Manager Nick Fernicola traveled up to the FFP Farm in Milford, New Jersey, earlier in the week to hand select some of the larger koi for the store and event. Then, on Saturday morning, Fitz and Tyler bagged up the koi selected for the event from the greenhouses and transported them to Fairfield. Our customers were able to take advantage of some great sales as we simulated our farm experience outside the Fairfield store.

In addition to the koi and the raffles, Don Schnoor and Tim Bock were able to educate hobbyists and answer many questions about filtration and the inner workings of specific pond equipment. Some customers were even fortunate enough to have one-on-one sitdowns with each.

Our FFP events are great not only for bringing together our loyal customers, but also for introducing us to so many new ones as well! From all of us at FFP, we want to thank those who came to the Fairfield Spring Koi Kick Off! We hope you had a blast. We know we did! We can't wait to see you all at Koi Fest 2023, which will be held on Saturday, Aug. 26. Call us at 908/301-4722 to inquire about visiting our farm to hand select koi or if you have any questions about Koi Fest!

MARKETPLACE



Hardscape North America 2023 Registration Opens

Registration is open for Hardscape North America, which is set to bring new products, technology, interactive exhibits and education to the Kentucky Exposition Center Oct. 18-20, 2023. With the HNA indoor exhibit space in the North Wing already sold out, attendees can expect to see and test the newest industry products at the nation's largest hardscape and landscape event.

Hardscape contractors and dealers, landscape professionals, design professionals and industry students and professors can register at www.HardscapeNA.com for the \$25 early bird rate through Sept. 7.

New and returning features at HNA:

- Hardscape House and Outdoor Demonstration Yard allow attendees to learn from live demos, watch the Installer Championships and get behind the controls of equipment.
- By popular demand, the annual HNA Installer Championship will increase the number of teams from 12 to 18.
- The opening keynote will feature Arctic explorer Ben Saunders.
- A Tuesday evening welcome reception at the downtown KICC, will provide free food, drinks and music by the Crashers.
- Education sessions and installer courses offer certification, business skills and marketing tools. New on the lineup this year are two natural stone education sessions: Ask the Natural Stone Experts and Tips for Sourcing Natural Stone & How to Make More Money.
- In the Drone Zone, attendees can test their ability on a flight simulator, and then fly a drone with an expert trainer in the new West Wing exhibit area.
- The Unilock Coffee Stop offers free coffee for attendees.

New this year, attendees are invited to a free arena concert featuring Third Eye Blind and opener Dylan Scott at the KFC Yum! Center in downtown Louisville on Thursday evening.

Access to the co-located Equip Exposition is included with HNA registration. For information, call 888/580-9960 or visit www.HardscapeNA.com.

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- 6.5ft cable length (mains to control box)

Model	Max Flow	Inlet / Outlet	Max Head	Max Watts	Voltage	Frequency	Dimensions
Varipump 10,000	2,640 gph	1"	18ft	90W	110V	60Hz	10.5" (l) x 4.8" (w) x 6.3" (h)
Varipump 20,000	5,280 gph	2"	21ft	190W	110V	60Hz	12.6" (l) x 5.8" (w) x 7.1" (h)

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Model	Flow Rate (US Gallons)	Max. Flow (US Gallons)	Ballast Power (W)	Ballast Voltage (V)	Ballast Frequency (Hz)	Dimensions (Length x Width x Height)	Dimensions (Height to Outlet)
ev015	4,200	1,900	15W	110V	60Hz	11.25" (l) x 4.5" (w) x 4" (h)	12.5"
ev025	5,300	2,500	25W	110V	60Hz	11.25" (l) x 4.5" (w) x 4" (h)	13.5"
ev030	7,300	3,500	30W	110V	60Hz	11.25" (l) x 4.5" (w) x 4" (h)	20.2"
ev055	14,300	6,500	55W	110V	60Hz	11.25" (l) x 4.5" (w) x 4" (h)	30.2"
ev0110	19,300	8,500	110W	110V	60Hz	11.25" (l) x 4.5" (w) x 4" (h)	38.2"

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- Tuesday, November 14, 2023 - Thursday, November 16, 2023
- Tuesday, January 9, 2024 - Thursday, January 11, 2024
- Tuesday, February 27, 2024 - Thursday, February 29, 2024

SESSION 2: WATER GARDEN SYSTEMS, MAINTENANCE & BIOLOGY

- Tuesday, December 5, 2023 - Thursday, December 7, 2023
- Tuesday, February 6, 2024 - Thursday, February 8, 2024
- Tuesday, March 12, 2024 - Thursday, March 14, 2024

SESSION 3: FOUNTAINS & FORMAL SPILLWAYS FOR THE HARDSCAPE

- Tuesday, January 23, 2024 - Thursday, January 25, 2024



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