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A Good Fit for the Trade?

Establishing Contractual Guidelines

The Magical Ki Utsuri

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Pond Trade Magazine
Back this year is the Product of the Year Challenge. There are many new products developed and launched each year for the pond trade industry. This Challenge is designed to spotlight the top new products for your pond related business. If you know of a new product in the last two years that you want to see included be sure to let us know.
Establishing Contractual Guidelines
Rick Bartel, Savio Water Feature Institute

A contract can make or break your business, so be sure to have a good one. Rick Bartel shares some guidelines that he has gleaned during his 20 years of experience as a veteran water feature contractor. Since there are some things you just can’t control like the weather, learn how to address this kind of issue and others that can affect your ability to get the work done and fairly paid for.

Fair Market Practices Elusive
Bettyjean Kling, www.pondarama.com

Here is one person’s opinion about pricing. Do you know what MAP pricing is? How do you decide to price items? Have you given much thought to how discounting affects your business and the industry as a whole? Are pricing standards a good thing or not? You be the judge.

Aquatic Plants Need Your Help to get Ready for Winter
Kelly Billing, Maryland Aquatic Nurseries

Fall is the best time of year for plant care and maintenance. Stop the number one reason plants die over winter, and learn how to over winter tropical marginals and lilies. Take care of the aquatic plants in your care now to give them the best chance for resurgence in the spring. Here’s how.

How to Be Happy Anytime
Leo Babauta, zenhabits.net

Do you wish you were doing something different, making plans for your life to come, reading (with jealousy) about cool things other people are doing? Learn about the mindset that states "whatever I’m doing right now is perfect." See how to integrate this kind of thinking into your daily life and be happier for it.

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Westminster, Maryland. Mid-Atlantic Koi Club’s 22nd Annual Koi Show.
www.makc.com

September 29 – October 1
The Landscape Show
Orlando, Florida
Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association
800-375-3642, info@thelandscapeshow.org,
www.thelandscapeshow.org

October 5 – 6
Aqua 2011
Shropshire, England • Telford International Centre, Impact Exhibitions, Ornamental Aquatics Trade Associations
www.aquatelford.co.uk

October 5 – 7
WaterSmart Innovations
Las Vegas, Nevada
www.WaterSmartInnovations.com

October 19 – 20
Landscape Ontario’s Expo
Formal Gardening & Flora Expo
Toronto, Canada
www.loexpo.ca

October 22 – 23
Texas Koi & Fancy Goldfish Fall Show
Marion, Texas • Held at Water Garden Gems
www.watergardengems.com
www.texaskoi.com

Know of an upcoming event, email us at cindy@pondtrademag.com

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Well, the popular Product of the Year Challenge is Back for 2011 – Now is the time to enter your new products, or recommend new products we should include in this year’s Challenge. Find the complete details and downloadable form at pondtrademag.com. If you released new products in 2010 or 2011 sign up before September 30 to be included.

If you are not a manufacturer, you can participate too by nominating new products you feel should be considered, with a simple email. Send your email nominations to product2011@pondtrademag.com. Include the manufacturer, the product name, and a brief note on why you feel it should be Product of the Year.

Winners will be announced at the IPPCA’s, INFO-Tanza, in San Diego this November. Winners will also be posted on our site at that time and published in the January/February 2012 issue of POND Trade Magazine.

Aquaponics – You have probably heard something about Aquaponics by now. What could Aquaponics mean for your business? Starting in this issue is a two-part series covering the facts you need to know. In addition, there is a short article about Hydroponics, so you can see the differences between aquaponics and hydroponics.

Fall/Winter Preparation for Overwintering – there are two articles in this issue; one focuses on koi and ponds, the other about protecting aquatic plants. Bone up on how to prepare for the change of seasons now, so you can help your customers’ koi and plants have a healthy winter, and a strong spring.

Contracts – Contracts are something we often put off thinking about, but they are a vital element of your business survival. Learn from an industry expert about things that can impact the completion of your water feature projects. Learn how to plan ahead, and make sure you get paid for your work!

Industry Events On Deck – By the time you read this, Pondemonium and the 2011 Pond Expo will have been completed. There are several more great events you can attend coming up - like KOI America (Sept.), Pool & Spa Expo (Oct/Nov), Info-Tanza (Nov.) and next year’s NAPP Conference in February. See dates in Upcoming Events. If you see us at any of these events please be sure to stop us (me and Cindy) and say hi. If you know of other events that are not yet on our calendar please let us know!

As we reach the end of this season, I hope each of you has had success in your businesses. As you reflect on the year, and begin to plan for 2012, please take a moment to look over the advertisers in POND Trade, and consider giving them a call, and the opportunity to earn your business. It is because of their support we are able to bring you POND Trade, and they deserve your support as well.
As the leaves start to drop and the temperature begins to fall, it’s time to think about how to care for your koi and koi pond.

Preparing the Pond for Fall

Leaves are one of the biggest nuisances for a koi pond in fall. To keep the leaves from getting into the pond, a useful tool is a pond net. Cover the entire pond with this net to catch any falling leaves. Leaves in the pond can be troublesome. If the pond has a bottom drain, the leaves could clog the drain. If the leaves make it to the filter, then there will need to be an increase in filter cleaning to remove the leaf matter. For ponds without bottom drains the leaves need to be manually removed. If the leaves are not removed from the bottom of the pond, as the leaf matter decomposes the water will be toxic to the koi.

Preparing the Koi for Fall

An important tool for your pond is a thermometer. Every pond will cool down and warm up at a different rate. The gallons of the pond, the surface area of the pond, the amount of shading around the pond are a few factors that take part in the ponds temperature.

At this time, if you do not heat your pond, we do not recommend adding new koi to your pond this season. For those must have Koi, we offer winter boarding for your Koi until your pond is ready to receive them in spring.

As your pond falls to around 60°F, you should change your koi food from their summer growing to a fall wheat germ food. This food will help clean out the koi’s digestive system in preparing them for their winter dormancy.

By having healthy koi and a healthy pond as winter approaches, you will be more likely to have healthy koi when spring arrives next year.

Winter Care for Your Koi

Winter time can be a stressful time for a koi owner. The pond is "closed" down for the season, feeding has stopped and the koi are dormant. The owner has to wait until spring to verify that all their koi are happy and health. But, a few simple steps can help assure that the koi will have a nice, easy winter.

Preparing Your Koi for Winter

An important tool for your pond is a thermometer. Every pond will cool down and warm up at a different rate. The gallons of the pond, the surface area of the pond, the amount of shading around the pond are a few factors affect the ponds temperature.

Thru the fall, you koi should have been moved onto a wheat germ based food to clear their digestive system for the winter. Once your pond water reaches 50°F, feeding of the koi should stop. As the water continues to cool, the koi goes into dormant phase. Dormancy is when a koi run on a low metabolic rate. Due to the koi is a cold blooded species, when in cold temperature they have a low energy need. To support their energy need during this time, they use their stored fat they gained over their summer feeding.

Warm winter days may cause your pond to warm up and the koi start to show activity. Do not be tempted to feed. Their bodies are still running at a low metabolic rate and they are
unable to digest any food they would eat. Wait until spring to begin feeding the koi.

"Closing" Your Pond Down for the Winter

There are many have different preferences when it comes to shutting the pond down completely for the winter or to let it stay running. It really comes down to the individual pond. If you have plumbing exposed to freezing, the best thing is to shut the filter down and empty the pipes. If your pipes are frost proof, then it is possible to keep the pond circulating thru the winter.

If you have a waterfall, running the water over the fall can chill the water further as it enters into the pond. As well, ice build up on the falls can cause diversion of the water as it flows down the fall over the side and possibly drain the pond. The best option is to bypass the waterfall for the winter and have the water enter the pond just above the surface to agitate the surface of the water. This will help keep the surface of the pond from freezing.

To keep the surface of the pond from freezing, keep the surface water moving by the incoming water, using air stones or a floating deicer. By keeping an opening in the surface is important for exchange of gases, releasing toxic gases and taking in oxygen.

Most important is to have your koi go into winter in good health, with good body weight and parasite free. It is the best way to ensure that they come out of the winter season happy and healthy.

About the Author

Mat McCann has kept koi from the age of seven. When Mat was 16, he was asked to spend a weekend babysitting a koi dealership that was managed by a friend of the family.

Mat loved working in the store, and he started working for them every weekend while he was in high school. Because of his love for koi, Mat went into the Aquaculture program when he was accepted at Liverpool University.

Long story short, Mat came to the U.S., at the request of Joe Zuritsky, for a two-day visit and decided to take the job at Quality Koi. He moved to America in July 2000. Mat now leads the team, with Ross Morgan, at Nisei Koi Farm.
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Aquaponics Explained Part I
A Good Fit for Pond Professionals?

by Joel Malcolm
Backyard Aquaponics

The Definition

Aquaponics is based on productive systems as they are found in nature. It can be loosely described as the combination of aquaculture and hydroponics and this is where the name aquaponics originates.

Hydroponic systems rely heavily on the careful application of man-made nutrients for the optimum growth of plants. The nutrients are made from mixing together a concoction of chemicals, salts and trace elements to form the ‘perfect’ balance. Water in hydroponic systems needs to be discharged periodically, as the salts and chemicals build up in the water, which becomes toxic to the plants. Aquaculture systems focus on maximizing growth of fish in tank or pond culture.

The fish are usually heavily stocked in the tanks often 10kg in 100L of water. The high stocking rates often mean that the tank water becomes polluted with fish effluent, which gives off high concentrations of ammonia. Water has to be discharged at a rate of 10-20% of the total volume in the tank once a day, everyday. This water is often pumped into open streams where it pollutes and destroys waterways.

Aquaponics combines both systems, and in doing so cancels out the negative aspects of each. Instead of adding toxic chemical solutions to grow plants, aquaponics uses highly nutritious fish effluent that contains almost all the required nutrients for optimum growth. Instead of discharging water, aquaponics uses the plants and the media in which they grow to clean and purify the water, after which it is returned to the fish tank. This water can be reused indefinitely and will only need to be replaced when it is lost through transpiration and evaporation.

Is Aquaponics Complicated?

It’s as simple as it seems, pumping nutrient rich fish water past the roots of plants, which extract the nutrient from the water. The principal method we deal with here is using grow beds filled with a medium, whether it’s gravel, river stone, crushed basalt, or expanded clay. Plants are grown in the media filled beds and water is pumped from a fish tank into the grow bed, draining through the gravel, and back into the fish tank.
systems, nutrient rich water is pumped down small enclosed gutters. The water flowing down the gutter is only a very thin film. Plants sit in small plastic cups allowing their roots to access the water and absorb the nutrients. NFT is only really suitable for certain types of plants, generally leafy green vegetables. Larger plants will have root systems that are too big and invasive, or they become too heavy for the lightweight growing gutters.

**DWC or Deep Water Culture**

Deep Water Culture works on the idea of floating plants on top of the water allowing the roots to hang down into the water. This can be done in a number of ways. This method is one of the more commonly practiced commercial methods. DWC can be done by floating a foam raft on top of the fish tank. However a more common method is to grow the fish in a fish tank and pump the water through a filtration system, and then into long channels where floating rafts filled with plants float on the water surface and extract the nutrients.

**Which Style is Best for Me?**

So there are the basics of aquaponics. It really can be as simple or as complicated as you like. If you want to start off small and simple take a piece of polystyrene, cut some holes in it, stick some mint cuttings or water cress cuttings through the holes, and float it on the surface of an aquarium or pond. Within no time you’ll end up with a mass of floating herbs, and you’ll have cleaner water for your fish. Through lots of experimenting over the years, and through the trials of members on the online discussion forum, the flood and drain media based system has been found to be the most reliable and the simplest method of aquaponics, especially for beginners. It can be done very simply using a wide range of different containers. The flood and drain media bed system also requires minimal maintenance.

**The Nitrogen Cycle**

One essential unseen element to an aquaponic system is beneficial bacteria. The bacteria flourish in the dark moist gravel filled grow beds, and break down elements in the water into a form which the plants can absorb and use. An aquaponic system is organic due to its very own nature. Synthetic fertilizers can’t be fed to the plants or it will adversely affect the fish and the beneficial bacteria. The system has to be kept natural.

There are two different bacteria that break down wastes from the fish: the first is Nitrosomonas, which converts ammonia into nitrites. These nitrites are then converted into
nitrates by Nitrobacter bacteria; the plants can then consume the nitrates to grow.

One interesting aspect of aquaponics is that it’s a self-balancing system to a great extent. As more nutrients become available through increased feeding of the fish, plant growth rates will increase to consume the extra nutrients. When fish are smaller or if the fish aren’t being fed as much feed growth rates of the plants will slow down accordingly.

**Recycled Materials**

Recycled containers like IBC International Bulk Containers, as well as second hand plastic drums and other similar equipment are commonly used by people to build aquaponic systems. This is done for many reasons: recycled materials can generally be found around the home, or sourced from salvage outlets fairly cheap, so you can build quite a large system for very little initial cost. Just be careful when using second hand materials. It’s useful to know what has been stored in containers before you decide to use them.

But really, there’s no excuse not to give aquaponics a go. If you feel a little unsure about starting and you want to make sure you get the best head start, then you can look at starting off with a kit system.

If you’re a handy person who prefers trying to build something from scratch, then keep your eyes peeled on refuse collections and at salvage retailers. Bathtubs are ideal for aquaponic grow beds, and they have drain fittings preinstalled.

**Importance of Fish**

Fish are the powerhouse of an aquaponics system. They provide the nutrients for the plants and if you’re growing edible fish, then they also provide protein for yourself. Keeping fish may be a little daunting to some, especially those without any prior experience, but you shouldn’t be discouraged. Keeping fish in an aquaponic system is simpler than keeping aquarium fish, so long as you follow simple guidelines. Then growing fish from fingerling size to ready-to-eat fish can be extremely simple.

**Choosing a Fish Species**

There are many different species of fish that can be used in an aquaponic system, depending on your local climate and available supplies. Our local climate in Perth, Western Australia, allows us to keep Rainbow Trout through winter, then a warmer species like Barramundi during summer. There are also a few choices for year round fish that we could grow, but they often take a longer time to mature. If you live in a cooler climate you might be looking at growing Trout all year round, or perhaps another locally produced fish species. In warmer areas of Australia people generally grow Barramundi, or Jade Perch year round. In most warm areas throughout the world Tilapia is the fish of choice.

You should take a few factors into account when deciding what the best species is for you to grow. The most important question is what do you want from your system. If you don’t want to eat your fish then you probably won’t want to grow edible fish, or you may want to grow an edible fish that can live year-round in your area, so that you’re not having to harvest fish out seasonally. The second most important factor is ‘What’s available?’ You need to be able to buy fish to stock your system, even with species such as Tilapia that breed readily. You need to get your broodstock in the first place.

Here’s a list of useful aquaponic species with a few details about each –

**Other Species**

There are other fish species, which are quite suitable for aquaponics that might be available in your local area. In Europe
many different species of carp are grown; within the United States such species as Bluegill are often available, while in Australia we also have a number of other native species like Sleepy cod, which would be suitable.

Other aquatic animals that can be incorporated into an aquaponic system are fresh water mussels, fresh water prawns, and fresh water crayfish. Mussels are a filter-feeder, and do a great job of helping to clean the water. They will happily grow in flooded grow beds, or can be incorporated into fish tanks. Crustaceans make a nice addition to an aquaponic system and there are a few different species available depending on your location and water temperatures.

For those in tropical areas there’s Redclaw, a fast growing native Australian species, and for those in cooler areas there’s Yabbies or Marron.

Yabbies breed readily, given the right environment and the correct water temperature, as well as long daylight hours. They also grow fairly quickly, but they can be prone to fighting and cannibalism when stocked very densely. The Yabby is also an attractive crustacean.

To be continued in the next issue.

About the Author

Backyard Aquaponics was started by Joel Malcolm in Australia after he stumbled across the idea over ten years ago. Being such a simple concept, he wondered why more people weren’t doing it. Joel wrote the first book about Aquaponics and started the Backyard Aquaponics forum http://www.backyardaquaponics.com/forum/ where contributors from around the globe began sharing their knowledge and inspiring others. Realizing there was a demand, the world’s first retail display centre was opened in 2007 with over a dozen different systems on display. He began installing kit systems for clients, providing monthly workshops and providing consultations on system design and maintenance. Backyard Aquaponics also produces a quarterly magazine, which features systems from all over the world; methods of pest control, recipes, fish keeping and research trials, available in either electronic format or printed glossy editions. For further information go to the www.backyardaquaponics.com

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POND Trade Magazine pondtrademag.com
Hydroponics is not new. It’s been practiced by gardeners for over a century now and actually dates back to the 1600’s when experimentation was first recorded. Hydroponics is the art and science of gardening without soil. I’ve been attracted to the availability of high growth yield in a limited space, since we seem to be running out of space in most of our cities and suburbs. It offers control over nutrient levels in their entirety, lowering fertilization costs, and when the water is recycled water is saved. I like that the growth containers are within reach so I have easy access to pruning and pest/disease management. So, overall, the benefits are: space-saving, cost-saving, and less effort to grow the same or more edible plants.

One thing to realize however is that many hydroponic plants require different fertilizers and containment systems. One size does not fit all. Considering the types of containment available for specific needs can be simplified. If the plant is one which requires a lot of water, or constant watering, and will not become oversaturated, a simple static solution system (a tank, tub or even water in a jar) will suffice. Many ornamental plants adapt nicely to this. But if the plant needs some time to dry out between waterings, something like the continuous flow or ebb and flow systems would work much better for this plant. Most fruit trees will fall into that category.

There are a wide variety of media to use when engaging in hydroponic gardening. It can be anything from perlite to gravel to lava rock to tree bark (and many more). The more dense the media, the more support will be offered to the plant. (And the larger the plant, the more support will be desired.)

Fertilization in a hydroponics system is not the same as in your terrestrial garden. It can be anything from perlite to gravel to lava rock to tree bark (and many more). The more dense the media, the more support will be offered to the plant. (And the larger the plant, the more support will be desired.)

By manipulating the water flow and additives, choice of grow media and lighting, this system can produce more fruit or vegetables per square foot than the same area outside, in the ground, with much less effort required. A (reusable) hydroponics grow unit, some starter nutrients in R/O water, and some Root Dip, Foliar Spray, and you too can be an independent organic farmer, putting healthy food on your own table in 3-6 months. In today’s market, it’s important to know what goes into your body. All stores have an Organic section. But do you want to pay the higher prices? Grow your own food the easy way, at home, inexpensively, and know for certain you are getting what you want with no harmful pesticides added.

About the Author

Carolyn is the author of the new book ABC’s of PONDS and she handles consumer relations for Ecological Laboratories, Inc as liaison to koi and water garden clubs across the USA and Canada. She has attended numerous Koi Health Seminars at UGA, and spent time at the Holland Koi Show. She is an active member of the NRA, the Cape Coral Friends of Wildlife (CCFW) and National Association of Pond Professionals (NAPP). She is editor of the Microbe-Lift Watergardener, a frequent contributing author, editor for MAKC magazine. She studied at SUNY in Farmindale for Horticulter and recently became involved in hydroponics. Her new home in Florida is landscaped and has a formal 4,000 gallon koi pond with all the bells and whistles. Carolyn is koi kichi and wants the best water for her fish.

www.microbelift.com • www.abc-ponds-book.com
Every year fish in "cold climate" ponds struggle through extreme stress and, in some cases, die due to "Aeromonas Alley."

What is "Aeromonas Alley"?

"Aeromonas Alley" is defined as when your pond water temperature ranges between 42°F and 62°F. Between these temperatures, the deadly "Aeromonas/Pseudomonas" (AP) bacteria grow much faster than your fish’s weak immune system. This makes it very difficult for your koi to fight off this deadly bacterial attack, causing ulcers, fin rot and more. In fact (AP) remains strong throughout the warm summer months. That’s why it’s so important to keep the numbers of (AP) as low as possible in your pond water.

Also beware of "Aeromonas Alley" in the fall when your koi pond water starts dropping below 65°F. At 65°F the immune system of your koi and pond fish starts to decline and weaken. By the time your pond water temperature drops to 60°F the immune system of your koi and pond fish is operating at less than 50% efficiency. However, the deadly (AP) bacteria is still strong and active and takes this opportunity to make their deadly attack on your weaken koi and pond fish.

To give your fish the protection they need to fight off "Aeromonas Alley" please visit: aquameds.com, click on medications then Aqua MedZyme Dry.
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"Over the last few years I would always lose one or two Koi as I over-wintered them. The water was dirty looking and spring clean-up was a chore to say the least. After using Arctic Blend for the first time, I have lost no fish and they look very healthy. The water is crystal clear and I will use this product every winter from now on. I would highly recommend it to anyone who has a pond in cold climate and wants the best for their koi during that period".

Dave H., Rochester, NY

"Rick, I opened my pond after a bad winter in NJ which has resulted in many people losing some prime Koi. All my Koi are alive and well and the pond is crystal clear. I have some 19 Koi in a 2500 gallon pond so clearly I have little margin for error. I am sure that ARCTIC BLEND is the major factor in keeping my fish alive and well. For the first time in three years I didn’t have problems with my Koi after the winter ‘stress’. Thanks again."

Harvey Hammer, NJ

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he Ki Utsuri is a black-based koi with yellow and black markings wrapping the body in stripes or checkerboard style. It’s one of the more unique looking koi types, always attracting attention. The comment I hear most often from customers is ‘Wow, that koi looks like a bumblebee!’

The Ki Utsuri is one of the three primary Utsuri types: the Shiro Utsuri, which is black and white, and is the most refined of the three; the Hi Utsuri, which is black and orange, and then the Ki Utsuri which is actually the least refined of the Utsuri. It’s the least refined in that the lineage or gene pool hasn’t been moved forward in attempts at improving color quality and body quality like the Shiro Utsuri.

The Shiro Utsuri has been refined primarily by default as in the main refinement of Shiro Utsuri coming about as a byproduct of Showa breeding and refinement for koi show competition, and from this breeders have further refined Shiro Utsuri lines. This refinement has produced Shiro Utsuri with stunning lacquer black patterning and razor sharp lines between white and black. The Ki Utsuri and Hi Utsuri tend to have a more flat charcoal black, and it’s common for them to develop small black specks within the yellow or orange patterning. Because of the refinement of Shiro Utsuri it’s hard for Ki Utsuri to compete head to head with them in koi shows. The Ki Utsuri holds its own though in the pond as a uniquely beautiful Koi that always grabs attention.

The Ki Utsuri comes in two types: a standard skin yellow and black, and a metallic skin yellow and black, which is called a Kin Ki Utsuri (Picture A), Kin being the metallic skin, and Ki being the yellow, and Utsuri being the black base. Ki Utsuri and Kin Ki Utsuri are easy to sell when the colors are up and popping bright but the higher quality slower developing young Ki Utsuri can be very difficult to sell simply because they are drab looking, and because many new koi keepers simply don’t understand the process of color development and maturity in Koi.

The Ki Utsuri babies in this tub (Picture B) are among my highest quality, and command a higher price than standard quality Ki Utsuri. They are what I label ‘future fish’ or koi that develop their colors slowly over a few years. These koi will start looking good with the yellow and black coloration thickening and solidifying at 2 years old to 4 years old, and the colors will keep improving over many years. So when choosing Ki Utsuri to retail you’ll want to make the decision as to which type,
metallic or non-metallic, and which quality range your customer base will buy, bright and colorful when young, or the more slow developing higher quality future fish.

The color yellow in koi does better without a lot of color enhancing feed. A Ki Utsuri that is fed foods high in color enhancers such as spirulina can develop orange spots within the yellow patterning, and the yellow color in general can be pushed more toward orange with foods high in color enhancers. The black color will show itself more vividly in ponds with harder water, higher pH, and with a higher silica content.

If you want to offer your koi and pond customers something unique and exciting, the Ki Utsuri may be just that koi. It's always popular among beginning to intermediate koi keepers.

About the Author

Brady Brandwood began Lotus Land Koi Farm in 1997, a 10 acre facility in Marshville, NC. He breeds Gosanke primarily, Kohaku, Showa, Sanke, but also produces Yamabuki Ogon, Chagoi, Kujaku, and Hariwake.

Brady has become one of the most respected Koi breeders outside of Japan, with an incredible list of Koi Show wins including Mature Champion, Adult Champion, Young Grand Champions, Baby Grand Champions, 22 Best In Size trophies, 14 Best In Variety trophies, several Best Male, Tategoi Awards, and other awards.

Brady breeds for quality, not volume sales, and specializes in the very best Show Koi, works of living art. Lotus Land Koi Farm is an isolated, biosecure facility, which doesn’t import Koi from other countries or other brokers or breeders.
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Establishing the wording of your business’ contract for services is very important for protecting yourself, your business and your clients by making it abundantly clear just what services and materials your business intends to provide; when the work is scheduled to commence as well as the projected completion date and what is not included within the scope of the project in question.

Transparency is the key to clarity, understanding and a successful and prosperous future endeavor. However, to assist you in avoiding many common contractual pitfalls experienced by other water feature installation contractors from around the world, we offer the following suggestions and guidelines. It must be noted here that we are not a licensed practicing attorney nor are we associated with any law firm. These are simply guidelines and suggestions to bring to your attention a number of possible liabilities that may be of concern. As always, you should contact a qualified attorney of your choice when handling any legal obligations you or your business may face.

To ensure that these contractual concerns are properly addressed, read, understood and acknowledged by your clients, the addition of appropriately titled clauses become necessary and should be utilized in your contract for services. In order to ensure that these additional clauses are verified as voluntarily acceptable by your clients, you should provide a small blank space or short line preceding each clause where your clients can place their initials acknowledging their acceptance of these terms and conditions outlined in each particular clause. The addition of a clause that states “By initialing each of the following clauses, you hereby acknowledge that you have read, understood and agree to said clause” will assist in the guarantee that no client can later falsely claim that they were unaware of any such clause prior to the commencement of the project in question.

The most common misunderstanding encountered with outdoor projects seems to be the commencement of work and the consequent date of completion. Many contractors fail to adequately account for unforeseen delays caused by circumstances beyond their personal control and fail to adequately convey those potential circumstances to their clients. Though these situations are technically not your fault, a wise contractor should always address these potential issues in an attempt to avoid any later misunderstandings or legal situations.

The most frequent and uncontrollable of these unpredictable delay factors is weather. As with any contract uncertainty; you need only provide a clause that addresses the potential issue, thereby clarifying that particular situation. A weather clause might be addressed as follows:

**Weather**

(Your Business Name) shall not be held responsible, accountable or liable for any delays in the project commencement, project completion or adjustments in material costs associated with any delays directly or indirectly caused or created by weather, changes in weather or damage caused by weather.

Notice that the above clause not only mentions delays in the commencement of the project but also the completion of the project. This will cover you if you are on another project and the weather slows down progress and you are unable to get to this particular client’s project on the projected start date as well as if you are already on this project and a weather situation fails to allow you to complete the project on the scheduled...
completion date. Also mentioned are adjustments in material costs. This is extremely important if all of your materials are not on site and a weather delay causes the materials to miss a delivery time or if the delay extends beyond a thirty day price guarantee and you are now forced to pay a potentially higher price for materials that could not be purchased and delivered to the project site due to weather problems. Not only do we address the weather and/or changes in the weather but, just as importantly, damage caused by weather. Otherwise you could be liable for the clean up and repairs to your unfinished project in the case, for example, that strong winds drop several large trees on your water feature project site during the construction process or an extremely heavy rain “floats” a pond liner that has been previously installed over a soil type that does not perk well.

Another issue that can create job site delays, which contractors seldom address until the situation actually happens, is a
reduction in your work force due to the fact that an employee is unable to report to work. Though this may not necessarily be a contract issue, it can most certainly be addressed here. A work force reduction clause might be addressed as follows:

Work Force

In the event of a situation in which one or more skilled and trained employees are unable to report to work due to unforeseen circumstances related to serious illness, injury or any other event or situation that may prevent said employee(s) from performing their assigned tasks and duties as outlined in their job description, the client agrees to extend to the company, a reasonable amount of time for the recovery of or possible replacement of the employee(s), whether temporary or permanent, with a suitably skilled replacement.

Take note here that we are attempting to cover all of the bases should an employee, or several employees, become ill, get in an accident, or even get into trouble and get locked up in jail. Whatever the case, you want to be sure that your contract allows you some time to find and/or train a replacement should it become necessary. You do not want to wake up one morning, prepared to complete an important project only to find out your much needed employees are not going to be available to assist you.

Payments or a payment schedule seems to be the thorn in the side of many contractors who rely on that somewhat steady stream of revenue in order to keep their business in operation with a certain amount of sustainable profitability. After all, you have got to make payroll, order and pay for supplies and don’t forget you need to take care of yourself and your family as well. Although a payment schedule can be arranged many different ways and many times these schedules need to fall in line with local and state regulations, here are some ideas to consider when outlining your schedule of payments.
Payments

The terms of payment for the herein described water feature project shall be as follows: one-third of the total project amount payable as a materials deposit and due at the time of signing this agreement and an additional third paid at the commencement of work with the remaining one-third balance and any adjustments that may have been added with my permission, due immediately upon completion of the project.

The above clause not only gets you a signed, legally binding contract agreeing to the water feature project as designed but also allows you a full one-third of the entire project balance as a materials deposit with which to make your initial supply and material purchases. Then as you and your crew return to the property on the prescribed date to begin work on the water feature project, you are once again given a full one-third deposit as outlined in the above clause, prior to the commencement of work. With this particular payment clause, you have been allowed to purchase the materials for the client’s project with their own money and have not so much as even put a single shovel into the ground and you already have two thirds of the entire project funds.

If you have calculated your budget for the project appropriately, you can never experience a financial loss with this type of set up. All of your business expenses and payroll should be fully covered with these first two one-third payments. You will receive your business’ profit and growth payment with the final one-third balance, once the project has been fully and satisfactorily completed. At the very worst, you will experience a break-even situation, should the client refuse to pay the final payment for whatever reason.

Make sure that you, your employees and your business have authorized permission and access to be on the property where you intend to install the water feature. This may seem unnecessary but you would be surprised at the number of situations that arise because of technical legalities. A typical access clause may be worded like this:

Access

I hereby acknowledge that I am the rightful owner of and legally authorized to give (your business name), their agents, employees and staff, full and complete access to the above listed property for the purposes of designing and installing the water feature as described above, and that it is safe to excavate on the proposed site with regards to underground utilities and/or any other hidden hazards, to the best of my knowledge. I also understand and agree that should any unknown or hidden features be discovered during construction, preventing the installation of the original design and budget, then I will be willing to accept alternative adjustments as determined appropriate.

It is important to notice that not only have you and your employees gained permission from the rightful property owner to be on this site in order to conduct your work but you have established whether there are any underground hazards that the property owner may be aware of. Some states require the property owner and not the contractor to permit the site for excavation. You will also notice that we have adequately covered any situation that may arise where an unknown object might prevent the installation of the project as originally designed. An example would be if you began to excavate a pond and you discover the world’s largest boulder 18” underground, right where the pond is supposed to be or perhaps an underground stream that no one was aware of.

Technically and legally without this clause, the property owner can force you to follow through with the project even if you incur great expense in having a demolition crew remove the problem boulder. This clause will protect you against such hidden and unknown situations and has them agree that “if” such an issue should arise, they will let you adjust the design to accommodate the potential problem. Notice also that we do not use the word “change.” That word will scare many of your clients, so we use a softer and more acceptable word…“adjust.”

Remember, should you ever be faced with any legal situation, always contact a suitable attorney of your choice to handle the matter properly. In order to better protect yourself should a legal situation become eminent, it is always best to be on your own home turf in regards to jurisdiction and financial obligations. So to keep your home court advantage, this suggestion was sent in by the good people at Coastal Pond Supply, Atlanta, Georgia:

Governing Law

Any project designed and installed by (your business name) for any client, shall be a (your state) contract and shall be construed in accordance with the laws of the State of (your state). Clients, Customers and Guarantor agree that the Magistrate, State and Superior Courts of (your county), (your state), or any other county in which (your business name) may later maintain its principal place of business, shall have personal jurisdiction over them and that these courts shall constitute the proper venue for any action or lawsuit relating to or arising out of this agreement. Client, Customers and Guarantor hereby waive any defenses they may have of lack of
personal jurisdiction or improper venue in any such action or lawsuit.

Basically this says that should any legal actions arise from the project you are providing for your client, that they will have to sue you in your home town county and state and not be able to force you to travel to them in order to answer the allegations. It should also be mentioned that those of you that reside or conduct business on or near a state boundary need to take into consideration the laws of all applicable states. Laws available in one state may not be in another.

There are many, many more situations and clauses that can help to keep your business out of hot water and sticky situations. This is intended to address the most common issues brought to our attention throughout the water feature industry.

About the Author

Rick Bartel; a twenty year experienced veteran water feature contractor; is the current administrator and primary instructor for the Savio Water Feature Institute whose industry wide popularity of advanced educational seminars has literally redefined the water feature installation industry. More than 7,200 industry professionals and contractors have attended Rick’s seminars and workshops worldwide, which have earned six prestigious awards for excellence in education.

Rick was awarded the "2010 Water Feature Contractor of the Year" and was a guest speaker at the 2011 International Water Gardening Symposium in Qingdao, China July 2011.

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My name is Bettyjean Kling, and I’m mad as hell and am not going to take it any more.

I sell retail pond supplies online at www.pondarama.com from a rural location in Pennsylvania, and have been in business for over six years. (I was a special education teacher in another life.) I’m open 24/7, offer extensive customer support and publish a regular newsletter, which I distribute electronically. I maintain a product inventory level slightly below 50K to service local customers, and my loyal distributors dropship everything else for me.

Like many others in the pond industry, I find it very difficult to make a living with profit margins shrinking at such a fast rate. While competition is healthy for all concerned, and usually benefits the consumer, unfair marketing policies practiced by a few greedy, short-sighted companies threaten to put a number of retailers and distributors out of business, if this practice becomes widespread enough.

Basically the problem is that a company with indiscriminate or non-existent sales policies will sell to online retailers at distributor prices! Distributor pricing is designed to provide an intermediate marketing level between the retailer and manufacturer. The distributor is expected to stock a manufacturer’s product (in large quantities) for immediate purchases by dealers and retailers, employ salespeople, and to provide a level of customer support. There is an extra price margin between a dealer/retailer price and a distributor price to cover this process. Unscrupulous companies who will sell to almost anyone at distributor pricing, abuse this process, and make it difficult for those of us who do play by the rules to make an honest living.

What normally happens is that a weak salesman or sales manager will give an online retailer distributor pricing as a reason to buy. The etailer will then use that extra margin, not to increase his profits, but to further discount the product (often at a little over his cost) in order to try and gain more market share. This situation has several undesirable effects: it tends to devalue the product and turn it into a commodity, just as pond liner has become in the last few years. It gives these etailers an unfair market advantage over other retail competitors who have to buy at dealer cost. It cuts the distributor out of the loop because the etailer will usually sell at wholesale pricing, or even lower to consumers. This cuts out the distributor’s dealer customers altogether. In other words, the product now retails at manufacturer’s wholesale prices, which actually reduces the market value of the product, as well as its marketability.

Some may say that this is just the free market at work, and I suppose it is. Distributors and retailers can exercise their version of the “free market”, too, by not buying products from manufacturers who intentionally devalue their own products, turn them into commodities, and create unfair, preferential pricing for some customers, at the expense of others. I’ve heard that the consumer ultimately wins from this situation, but that theory won’t hold up either. When an etailer buys products manufacturer-direct at distributor pricing, offers free shipping, and sells retail at just above their cost, then just how in the world do these slim margins finance any customer support or service?? They don’t, and that’s the problem. Ponds are still an intensely service-driven enterprise, with consumer knowledge on a very low level. If you look at the companies in the pond industry who offer the best customer support, you won’t find a single one which operates on razor thin margins. It can’t be done, so the consumer actually loses in these price wars, which hurts the industry, rather than helps it. Everyone loses—even the manufacturers who are cutting their own throat.

I have made a lot of noise about this issue on my website www.pondarama.com and forums and I am starting to become noticed in the industry. A couple of distributors who are publicly helping me to agitate this issue, have already been told by certain manufacturers to stop working with me or their buying privileges will be cut off. I’ll give those manufacturers a message right back: “Stop selling at distributor pricing to those retail companies who are devaluing your products, and making it impossible for the rest of us to compete, or we’ll ALL stop buying your products!” The “free market” cuts both ways.

Of course not all manufacturers are guilty of this, and there are a number of responsible companies who are trying...
to preserve the integrity of their products with programs such as IMAP and MAP programs, and who practice fair pricing policies. Minimum Advertised Pricing is not the complete answer to the problem of runaway pricing issues, product devaluation and commoditization, but it is a start. These same companies usually have firm sales policies in force, which govern eligibility for distributor pricing.

And sometimes during all the heated debate, something really funny happens. A few weeks ago, a CEO for a well-known West Coast manufacturer wrote a letter that was very critical of my efforts, and he referred to me in a very uncomplimentary manner, too. But instead of sending it to his sales rep, he accidentally e-mailed it to me. Hee, hee. I posted it on my website, and everyone got a good chuckle from that.

There are also several legitimate distributors who retail online, but who do not sell at price levels that make it impossible to compete, so we patronize them too.

I would like to urge all distributors and retailers to only buy from those manufacturers who set up a fair and level playing field with regards to price, and to boycott those who do not. I would like to thank all of the manufacturers, distributors, retailers, magazine publishers, and others who continue to help me in my efforts. We are making progress.

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Aquatic Plants Need Your Help to get Ready for Winter

by Kelly Billing
Maryland Aquatic Nurseries & AboutTheLotus.com

Fall is the best time of year for plant care and maintenance. Spring is too busy with winter clean up, lawn maintenance, mulching, planting and more going on in the surrounding landscape. If a majority of the pond work is completed in the fall then your focus can be elsewhere in the spring. So when you are tired and overheated from other spring garden work you can rest your feet in the water to cool yourself down and simply enjoy the emerging beauty in the garden pond as it comes back to life.

Aquatic plants die out during the winter.

Late August to mid-September is the ideal time to prevent the leading cause of death to pond plants over the winter. Often plants have grown so vigorously over the summer months that they have become completely root bound and starved for nutrients. These weak plants become very susceptible to pests and disease due to their less than vigorous state. Think of it as being run down and getting the flu. You are much better equipped to fend off a serious infection if you are healthy and well nourished. It’s the same for plants except their weakened state may result in death over the winter months.

Any plants that are struggling for space and nutrients should be provided a fall division to provide ample space in the container, fresh soil and temperature release fertilizer (Nutricote) so it will be available when needed early in the spring. The difference is dramatic in the success rate over winter and in the vigor, beauty and increased flowering they will provide you with in the spring. (Lotus should be the only plant that division is reserved for the spring.)

By the time September comes most fertilization should have been discontinued to allow plants to consume the nutrients they require before cooler weather sets in. Some plants are particularly sensitive to unused fertilizer so late feedings may lead to their demise over the winter months. Depending on your area final feedings should be ended in late July for zones 3-5; early August for zones 6-7 and mid-August for zones 8 & 9.

Deadheading and cutting back shouldn’t take place until frost has caused yellowing of the foliage at the very least. Brown is even better. Plants need to retract their energy and store it for the winter months. Prematurely removing their green foliage will weaken them and limit their ability to survive winter. Plants that have particularly sturdy stems may be left uncut for winter.

Over wintering tropical plants indoors should occur no later than early September. If they get moved in too late they have been exposed to the cool night temperatures that may set their clocks in the direction of hibernation. Most tropical marginal plants will winter just fine in anything from a decorative no-hole container to a bucket or dishpan. They not only add interest to the indoor environment but they add some much necessary evaporative moisture to the dry environment of the heated house of the northern climate.

Tropical lilies can be wintered indoors as well and there are a number of different methods to accomplish the goal. The best instructions I’ve ever seen are in Greg and Sue Speichert’s Encyclopedia of Water Garden Plants that is also the best aquatic plant book I’ve read. It contains more useful plant information than several other books combined.

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Aquatic plants die out during the winter.
interest and plants that have hollow stems should be cut just above the high water level. It limits water from entering through the stems and permitting diseases and/or fungal attacks.

There is also an age-old rumor that plants should be dropped to the bottom of the pond to protect them for the winter months. If they are hardy to a particular zone then they are perfectly capable of sustaining the temperatures that winter may dish out. Dropping them to the bottom can increase the likelihood of their demise over the winter.

“I’ve often said ‘there aren’t any little fairies that go around and move plants in natural ponds down to the bottom for the winter. If that’s where they live then they can take it.”

On the other hand winter sometimes dishes out extreme temperatures and conditions that would be considered unreasonable or extraordinary. In that case you are simply at the mercy of Mother Nature and it isn’t always a winning proposition. However that can always be looked at as an opportunity to get something new! Gardening has long been a lesson in patience and perseverance!

Following all of the recommendations listed above will help to ensure that your plants are not at an additional disadvantage to fail through the winter and you will be rewarded with healthy stunning growth as it unfolds in the spring. Then you can just sit back and enjoy the show! ☺

Hibiscus White Fly

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Fourth Generation Joins the Ozark Fisheries Team

Ozark Fisheries, a family-owned and operated ornamental fish and beef cattle operation, is pleased to announce the addition of Joseph Cleveland to the Ozark Fisheries team. Joseph, a fourth generation fish farmer, is the son of Lawrence and Jana Cleveland and great grandson of Ozark Fisheries’ founder, Lawrence Bailliere.

He attended Missouri State University majoring in business. Joseph is the general manager and currently running the day-to-day operations at the Ozark Fisheries facility in Martinsville, Indiana. We are excited by the addition of Joseph and look forward to everything he will bring to the Ozark Fisheries team.

Ozark’s business includes the production and marketing of goldfish, koi and beef cattle. We have been serving the pet industry with quality feeder and fancy goldfish, including shubunkins, sarasa commons, red fantails, calico fantails, and black moors for more than eight decades. Over the past several years, our product line has grown to include rosy red minnows, koi and butterfly koi, snails, tadpoles, crayfish, mosquito fish, along with koi and goldfish food. We are also a cow/calf beef producer centered on the Angus breed. We have farming operations located in Stoutland, Missouri and Martinsville, Indiana. Ozark Fisheries was established in 1926 and is celebrating its 85th birthday this year.

Ozark Fisheries, Inc.
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Stoutland, Missouri 65567
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International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society Unveils New Logo

Churchville, NY – The International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society (IWGS) took a step toward the future this month when it unveiled its new logo. The new logo symbolizes the Society’s international membership and its dedication to the furtherance of water gardening and its associated plants.

The new logo shows a pink waterlily embraced by the globe. Green and blue leaves symbolize a lily pad atop water. With the official launch of the new logo, the Society also reveals that a new website is currently underway and will go live later this summer or early fall.

The IWGS will begin incorporating its new logo into marketing materials this month.

For more information on the IWGS, log on to www.iwgs.org or call 585-293-9144.

Supreme-Hydroponics 3’ and 4’ Merchandise Displays

Danner Mfg, Inc. has put together a well thought out assortment of their new Supreme-Hydroponics display. Offered in both a 3’ and 4’ selection. These attention-grabbing displays offer a variety of products including air and water pumps, nutrients, lighting, flood/reservoirs, growing media and more.

Danner Mfg., Inc.
160 Oval Drive
Islandia, NY 11749
631-234-5261
dannermgf.com

To see full press release and additional new items go to http://www.pondtrademag.com/tradenews/
Aquascape, Inc. Introduces Pond Fish Vitamin Treat

St. Charles, IL – Aquascape, Inc. announces its new Pond Fish Vitamin Treat, complete with a revolutionary new application formula and scientifically designed to keep pond fish looking their absolute best. Each depression of the pump top bottle creates a small worm-like looking treat for your pond fish.

“Our goal was to create a new and fun way of getting your fish to eat vitamins,” states Scott Rhodes, director of product marketing for Aquascape, Inc. “With Aquascape’s Pond Fish Vitamin Treat, you can create cool and nutritious worm-like snacks for your pond fish to enjoy!”

Aquascape Pond Fish Vitamin Treat increases appetite and vitality, enhances natural colors of the fish, and stimulates breeding. Pond and Fish Vitamin Treat includes vitamins, nutrients, lipids and garlic, used for centuries as a health supplement and recently as a control for internal and external parasites.

For information on Aquascape products visit www.aquascapeinc.com or call 866-877-6637 (US) or 866-766-3426 (CAN).

Firestone Specialty Products Joins IPPCA

The IPPCA (International Professional Pond Companies Association) takes great pleasure in announcing its newest corporate member, Firestone Specialty Products. Firestone SP has long been the largest supplier of pond liner to our industry and the only US manufacturer of EPDM pond lining material. The Firestone corporate membership with the IPPCA marks a new milestone in the forward progress of the Pond and Waterscape Industry’s Trade Association. Working together with Firestone SP and other Pond Industry manufacturers the IPPCA is advancing steadily towards fulfilling its corporate mission: “To Promote, Protect, and Advance the Pond and Waterscape Industry.”

The IPPCA’s 7th annual INFO-Tanza™ is being held in conjunction with the Irrigation Show at the San Diego, CA convention center November 5-8. Attendees will have the opportunity to register and participate in the Firestone Specialty Products Liner Certification Training Class. This seminar is a must for all pond industry professionals and focuses on the proper installation procedures of Firestone Pond Liner.

This years 3 Day INFO-Tanza™ will also feature 16 other educational seminars covering a wide spectrum of the pond industry. This year will mark the 7th straight INFO-Tanza and its largest conference to date. The IPPCA invites you to join Firestone SP and the rest of the Pond Industry at this years “Must See Event.”

For more information and to register for INFO-Tanza please visit www.INFOTANZA.com • www.IPPCA.com

Supreme-Hydroponics 250 GPH Water Pump With Venturi for Aeration

The Supreme-Hydroponics recirculating water and air pump includes a venturi feature that aerates return water flow, which helps stimulate root growth in Hydroponic applications. Features include time proven magnetic drive technology energy efficient, inline or submersible operation. Front mounted adjustable venturi, ½” FTP inlet and MPT outlet, 10’ power cord and is oil free.

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EasyPro Upgrades Koi Pond Aeration Kits

EasyPro koi pond and ornamental aeration systems now come with Quick Sink self-weighted air tubing. The LA5N and LA10N economy aeration kits from EasyPro include energy efficient linear compressor with a two-year warranty, air diffuser, and now 15’ of Quick Sink tubing. The LA5N is sized to aerate ponds up to 3000 gallons with only 15 watts of power (MSRP - $199.99.) The LA10N is sized to aerate ponds up to 8000 gallons with only 34 watts of power (MSRP – $264.99.) These economical systems are perfect for summer time aeration or winter time deicing.

For more information or a free catalog call us at 800-448-3873 or visit our website www.easypropondproducts.com
Mars Fishcare North America, Inc. Positions for Accelerated Growth with the Appointment of National Sales Director Jeffrey Tyo.

Chalfont, PA– Mars Fishcare, North America is pleased and excited to announce the addition of Jeffrey Tyo, as the newly appointed Mars Fishcare National Sales Director. He brings with him 10 years of experience from a variety of roles within Mars ranging from Mars Veterinary, Mars Pet care as well as key industry experience from Central Garden and Pet.

Mr. Tyo will be overseeing the national sales organization and national accounts. He will also help to drive forward key business initiatives as a member of the Mars Fishcare Leadership Team.

Information regarding all Mars Fishcare brands can be found at www.marsfishcare.com.

Matala Lake Aeration Systems

Matala Water Technology introduces our new Lake Aeration Systems. Industrial grade Rocking Piston Compressors are manufactured to highest standards. Breathe life into your lake or reservoir.

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Kodama Koi Farm Lands in Northeastern US – Saddle River, New Jersey

Kodama Koi Farm, newest location is located at Waterford Gardens, a famous destination for water plants, especially beautiful water lilies since 1895. This is a perfect place to not only find their Niigata thoroughbred koi, but also equipment, food, water plants and all your supplies. In addition maintenance consultation, design and contracting services for authentic Japanese koi ponds and gardens will be available.

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My friend Barron recently asked, “If you could be anywhere right now, doing anything you want, where would you be? And what would you be doing?”

And my answer was, “I’m always where I want to be, doing what I want to be doing.”

I’ve notice that in the past, like many people, I was always wishing I was doing something different, thinking about what I would do in the future, making plans for my life to come, reading (with jealousy) about cool things other people were doing.

It’s a fool’s game.

Many of us do this, but if you get into the mindset of thinking about what you “could” be doing, you’ll never be happy doing what you actually “are” doing. You’ll compare what you’re doing with what other people (on Facebook and Twitter, perhaps?) are doing. You’ll wish your life were better. You’ll never be satisfied, because there’s “always” something better to do.

Instead, I’ve adopted the mindset that whatever I’m doing right now is perfect. If I’m writing a post, that’s amazing. If I’m reading blog posts on the Internet, that’s interesting. If I’m doing nothing but hanging out with my family, that’s incredible. If I’m walking outside, enjoying the fresh air, that’s beautiful.

There’s nothing I’m ever doing that isn’t the most incredible thing on Earth. If I’m doing something sucky (I can’t remember doing that recently), maybe that’s an invaluable life lesson. If I’m with someone boring or obnoxious, it’s a lesson in patience, or empathy, or in learning to understand people better.

The Now Mindset, In Practice

Let’s say you’re washing the dishes. Wouldn’t you rather be having a delicious meal instead, or talking with your best friend? Sure, those things are great, but they’re only better if you believe they’re better, and more importantly, the comparison is totally unnecessary. Why should you compare what you’re doing now (washing dishes) with anything else? Wouldn’t almost anything lose out if you compare it to something you like more? Will you ever be happy with what you’re doing if you always compare it with something you like more?

Washing dishes can be as great as anything else, if you decide to see it that way. You’re in solitude, which is a beautiful thing. If you do it mindfully, washing dishes can be pleasant as you feel the suds and water in your hands, pay attention to the dish and its texture, and notice your breathing and thoughts. It’s meditation, it’s quiet, and it’s lovely.

You can say the same of anything. Driving to work? Enjoy the solitude, the chance to be alone with your thoughts, or to listen to music you love, to see the world around you. In a meeting with co-workers? Pay attention to how people talk and interact, learn about the human mind, see yourself in everyone around you, learn to love anyone no matter who they are, practice giving up expectations of who people should be or what this meeting should be like.

I’m always happy with what I’m doing, because I don’t compare it to anything else, and instead pay close attention to the activity itself. I’m always happy with whomever I’m with, because I learn to see the perfection in every person. I’m always happy with where I am, because there’s no place on Earth that’s not a miracle.

Life will suck if you are always wishing you’re doing something else. Life will rock if you realize you’re already doing the best thing ever.

About the Author

Leo Babauta is married with six kids, he lives in San Francisco, he is a writer and a runner and a vegetarian, and the owner of Zen Habits. He also is the author of a new best-selling book, “The Power of Less: The Fine Art of Limiting Yourself to the Essentials … in Work and in Life.” If you want Zen Habits’ philosophy in a handy little volume, please buy the book.

Zen Habits is one of the Top 100 blogs on the Internet, and covers: achieving goals, productivity, being organized, GTD, motivation, eliminating debt, saving, getting a flat stomach, eating healthy, simplifying, living frugal, parenting, happiness, and successfully implementing good habits.

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