

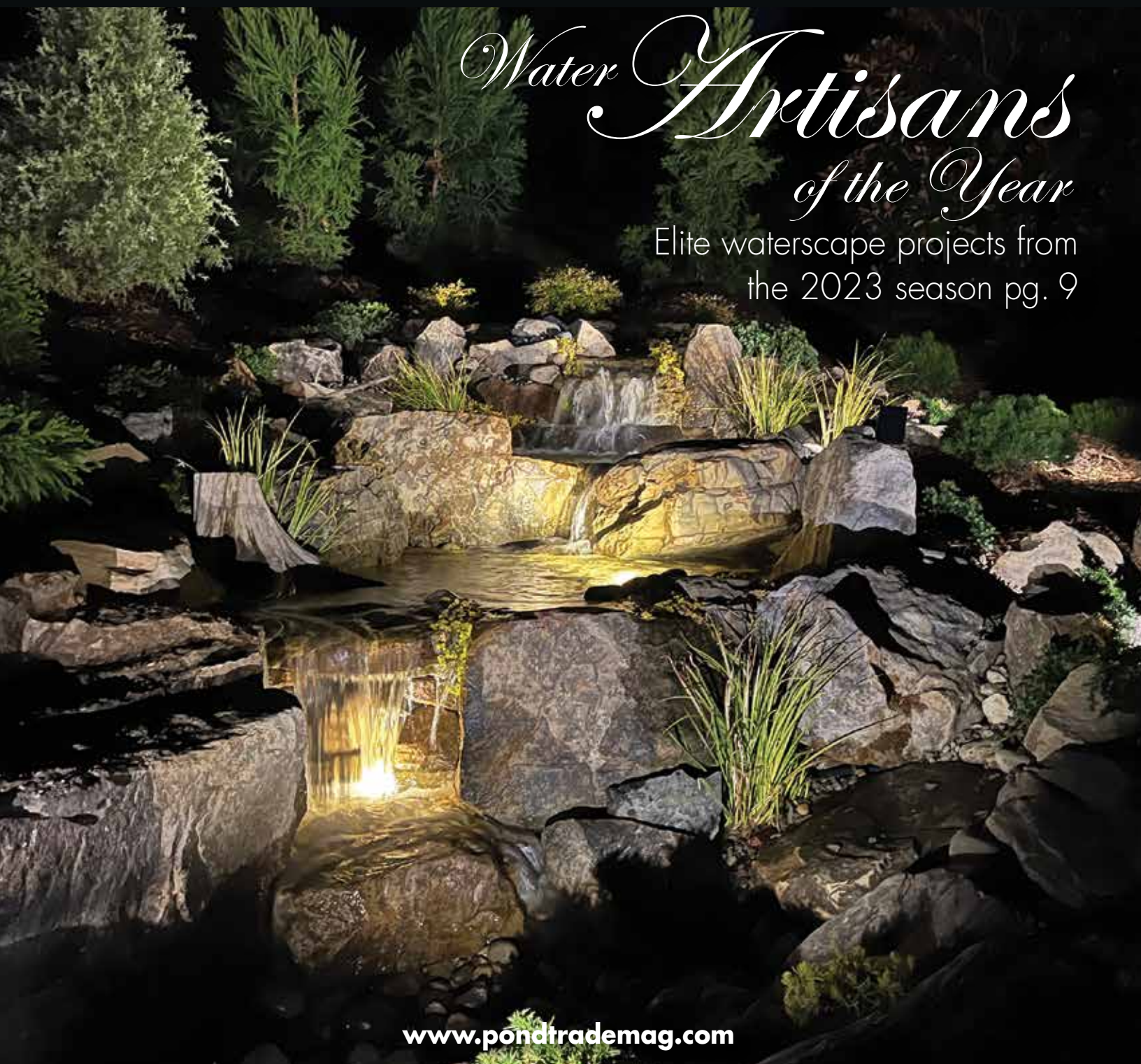
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Water Artisans of the Year

Elite waterscape projects from
the 2023 season pg. 9



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WATER ARTISANS of the YEAR



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Pond rebuilds usually tend to be expansions, but **Mark Pankowski** and his Premier Ponds team hadn't anticipated creating something of this magnitude. This totally "juiced" project forever changed his team's approach to pond building.

30 The Life Cycle of a Water Feature

As the famous song by The Byrds goes, "To everything there is a season." The same can be said for ponds, as **Patrick Simmsgeiger** lays out in this climate-conscious feature.

37 Oh My Gourd!

In the second installment of our new "Beyond the Pond" feature that profiles pond builders' other hobbies, **George Janowiak** introduces us to the world of growing gigantic pumpkins. Who knew it could be so competitive — and so much fun?

46 2023 IWGS New Waterlily Competition

It's the silver anniversary of the staple industry event organized by the International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society. **Suzanne Boom** profiles the best blooms of 2023.

51 Domestic is Not a Dirty Word! LANGUAGE OF KOI

Japanese koi are all the rage right now, but **Ellen Kloubec** offers a counterpoint opinion in defense of sourcing high-quality koi domestically, which carries a lot less risk. Take a trip to Kloubec Koi Farm and check out how she does it.

57 Create Your Own Pond-cast

Our publisher, Lora Lee Gelles, recently appeared on **Eric Triplett's** The Pond Digger Podcast. Triplett has leveraged "pond-casting" to expand his business reach and shares his tips about how to make it work for you.

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Upcoming Events

2024

February 28 - March 1

Water Garden Expo
Firelake Grand Casino
Shawnee, Oklahoma
www.wgexpo.com

March 8 - 10

Central Florida Koi and Goldfish Show
Avanti Palms Resort
Orlando, Florida
www.cfkfs.org

March 23 - 24

All-American Koi Show Las Vegas
Silverton Hotel and Casino
Las Vegas, Nevada
www.allamericankoisshow.com

March 26 - 28

National Hardware Show
Las Vegas Convention Center
Las Vegas, Nevada
www.nationalhardwareshow.com

July 16 - 20

IWGS Symposium
Reading, England
www.iwgs.org/symposium

August 17 - 21

Pondemonium
Q Center
St. Charles, Illinois
www.aquascapeinc.com/professionals/
pondemonium

October 16 - 18

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

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Publisher's Perspective

Eight is GREAT!

And that's a wrap! We have officially closed the book on the eighth year of our Water Artisans of the Year contest. Now it's all yours to enjoy — turn the page and check out the top 2023 water-gardening projects handpicked by our Supreme Stream Court.



The POND Trade staff has been very busy behind the scenes preparing for this issue. It's a bit like Santa's workshop, where all the elves pitch in to get the job done. Our web editor Joanne stayed very busy promoting the contest. When the entries started coming in, I processed them all by hiding all the personally identifiable information and sending them over to the judges, who did a great job looking at each entry and choosing their favorites.

Our editor Jordan then took all the selections and wrote about each winner and runner-up. I love a team effort! Please enjoy the fruits of our efforts and behold the most impressive entries we received this year. You might find it inspiring for your own work or even motivating for you to enter next year's contest!

But wait, there's more. This extra-large issue is chock full of great articles to keep you informed and entertained. Our inaugural "Beyond the Pond" segment was a big hit in the last issue, so for this issue, George Janowiak is weighing in (literally) on his pumpkin-growing hobby ("Oh My Gourd!" pg. 37). Do you have an interesting hobby outside the aquatic realm that you'd like to share? Shoot me an email. You could be featured in a future "Beyond the Pond" segment!

There is so much beauty to behold in this issue. Suzanne Boom of the International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society (IWGS) gives us a rundown of the 2023 New Waterlily Contest results, and this year there are some real stunners (pg. 47). We've been covering imported Japanese koi a lot recently, so we are thankful to have Ellen Kloubec provide the upside of sourcing koi domestically ("Domestic is Not a Dirty Word!" pg. 51). Finally, Eric Triplett is back with tips on how to get your own "pond-cast" up and streaming on pg. 57.

Happy PONDering!

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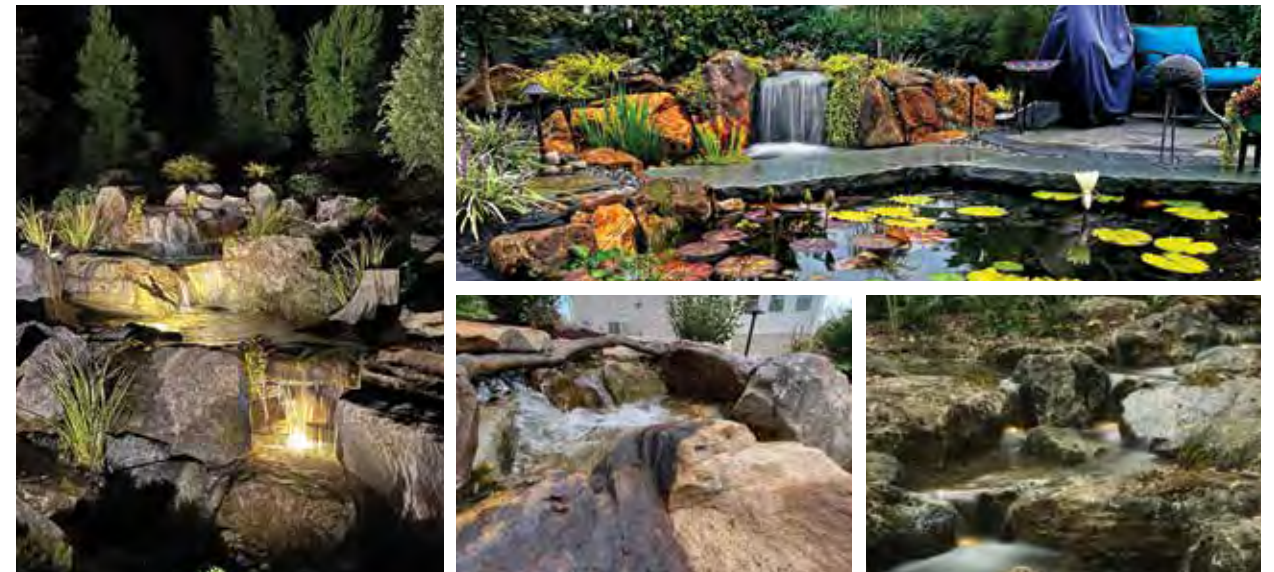
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Water Artisans of the Year Winners

Elite waterscape projects from the 2023 season

by **Jordan Morris**,
Editor, POND Trade magazine

Now in its eighth year, POND Trade magazine's Water Artisans of the Year contest continues to captivate the industry by showcasing the best of the best water-feature projects around the globe on a level playing field, without corporate sponsorships or influence.


Highlights of this year's contest include three first-time winners and two first-time runners-up, signaling growth in the popularity and reach of our contest. We're also celebrating our third ever triple-crown

winner, Bobby Kenyon of C.E. Pontz Sons, who took home first place in Fountains & Formal Features. That makes a record-setting seven placements for Kenyon and his team (three wins, four runners-up) — can you say, “wow?”

The category count shrank from five to four this year, further elevating the level of difficulty for our contestant pool. As in previous years, we collected project submissions and presented them to an independent judging panel with no brand names or contractors' identities revealed. (Meet the judges on pg. 19!) We solicited entries in the four most popular categories from previ-

ous years — Best Pondless, Most Naturalistic, Best Project under \$20,000, and Fountains & Formal Features.

We required a \$25 fee with every submission, which culminated in approximately \$2,000 donated to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, an award-winning charity that provides cutting-edge treatment to children without requiring payment.

Here, without further ado, are your 2023 pond season Water Artisans of the Year! 

Meet the judges!
Page 19

WINNER Fountains & Formal Features



Bobby Kenyon

Bobby Kenyon of C.E. Pontz Sons in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, celebrates his third win in our contest. C.E. Pontz Sons has some of the most creative and well-trained employees in the landscape and outdoor living industries. When it comes to water features and outdoor living spaces, they pride themselves on being different, not your everyday, run-of-the-mill, cookie-cutter landscaper.

We hereby welcome Bobby Kenyon and C.E. Pontz Sons to the Triple Crown Club! They're joining an elite group of water-feature artisans that includes Art of the Yard and Aquatic Edge Consulting.

"We are a tight-knit team who love what we do and take pride in the art we create," Kenyon said.

This mammoth of a backyard renovation secured his first win in our formal category. The final project is akin to a personal event venue and includes two large patios that encompass a sprawling, bustling koi pond flush with vibrant aquatic plants.

A large, natural-stone bridge connects the patios and enables multiple viewpoints of the pond, which is home to multiple fish caves. Over one side of the pond looms a large, stacked-stone wall that helps to retain one of the two patio living areas.





WINNER Under \$20k

Bradley Blocksom



Bradley Blocksom is one of our youngest Water Artisans of the Year winners, having developed his talent and workmanship under his father, Dave Blocksom at Pondscapes of Charlotte. Bradley is an avid builder and designer and has his sights set on taking over the company when his father retires.



One of the most impressive talents of a gifted water artisan is the uncanny ability to re-engineer an environment through the imagination of a client. This backyard waterfall was built by first-time winner Bradley Blocksom (Pondscapes of Charlotte) for one Mr. Tuttle.

The client was an avid hiker who spent his early years climbing mountains and seeking adventure. Now he lives in a 55+ community with his wife on the East Coast. He missed the Pacific Northwest, where he was originally from, and was tired of being stuck at home. However, like most retirees, Mr. Tuttle was on a budget. Blocksom had the perfect economical elixir in mind.

“This waterfall was built to help subdue his longing for nature and adventure,” Blocksom said. “He now spends time by the waterfall with his wife reminiscing about the past.”

Peace of mind without breaking the bank — the perfect combination for a truly grateful client.





WINNER **Pondless** **Mike Donas**

Mike Donas, a first-time winner in the contest, owns Donas Outdoor Living, a landscape and hardscape design-build company. His journey into crafting captivating water features commenced in 2020 after his passion was ignited by the inspirational work of two-time Water Artisans of the Year winner Weston Zimmerman of SynkedUP and Tussey Landscaping.

Crafting outdoor landscaping art is a competitive industry in Western Pennsylvania, but Mike Donas and his team have risen to the top with the construction of this majestic waterfall, which also snagged them their first Water Artisans of the Year nod.

The feature seamlessly blends into the client's yard, upgrading the property's landscape profile and curb appeal. Visible from the home's porch, patio and backyard, the client also wanted to be able to hear the soothing crashing and trickling of water throughout the nearby area.

"(Pondless waterfalls) are great for homes with children because there's no actual body of water present, which makes them a safe alternative to traditional ponds." Donas said. "Water is simply recirculated using a water pump and in-ground reservoir."

"We had a great time creating this and are excited for our next project!" he added.



WINNER

Most Naturalistic

Thomas VanAmerongen

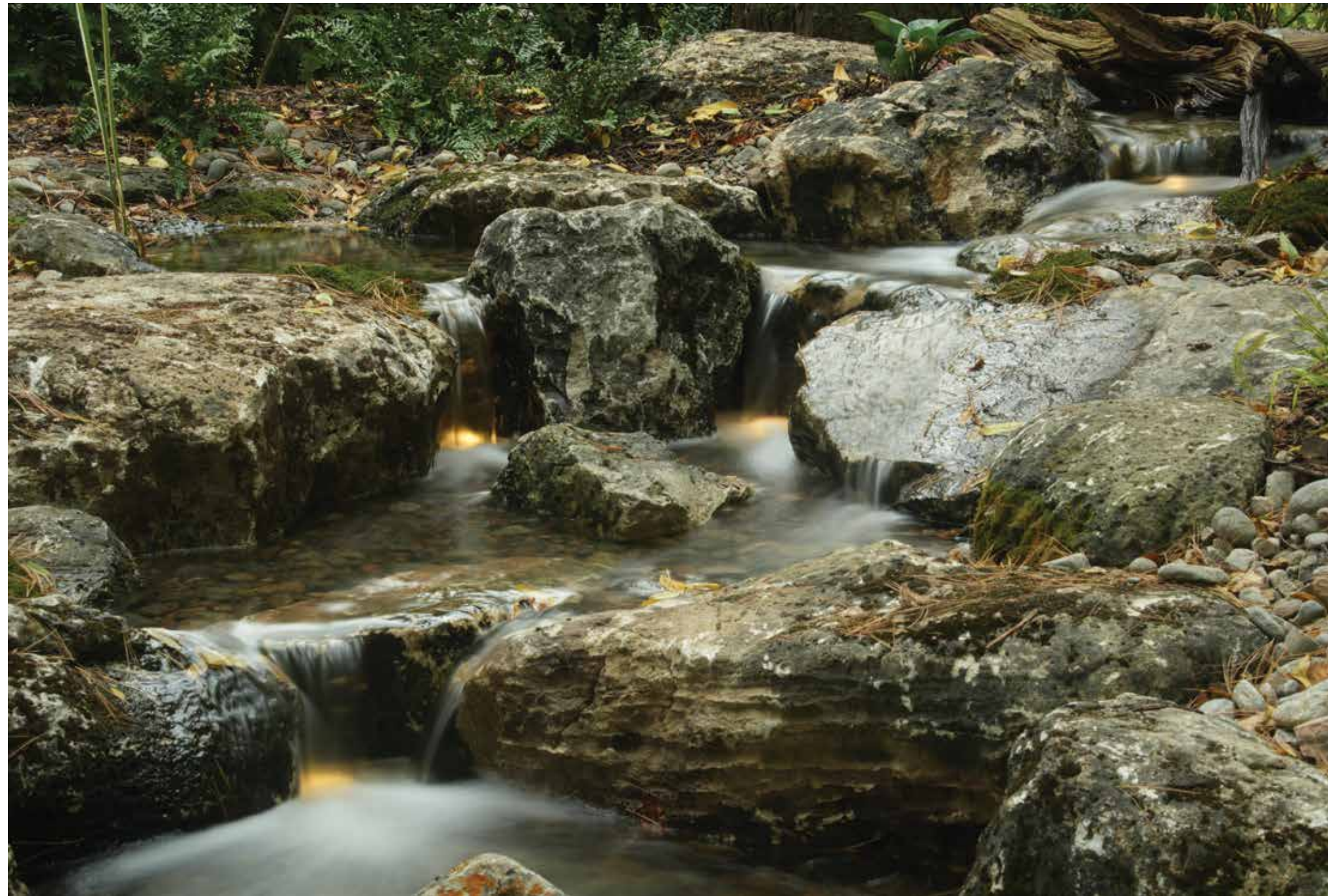


Thomas VanAmerongen is the owner of Niagara Waterscapes of Ontario, Canada. He specializes in creating natural ponds, waterfalls and fountains to bring out the natural beauty on any property. This small business is a first-time winner in our contest and is known for its attention to detail that accentuates the naturalistic effects in all its projects.

This ecosystem pond, which measures 11 by 16 feet, comes across as a centuries-old, naturally occurring rockscape sculpted by free-flowing water. Two streams are recessed into the berm — one quiet and the other rushing its way back and forth, eventually dropping back into the pond. The constant bustle of activity is quite the marvel for this feature, which requires a surprisingly minimal amount of upkeep.

“This is what the water-gardening world is all about,” builder Thomas VanAmerongen said. “The way we design and install our low-maintenance makes it so anyone can ... enjoy all the water-gardening benefits!”

A mixture of large and small weathered limestone boulders was integrated to create both the crashing waterfalls and the vibrant pond. VanAmerongen and his team added moss to the rocks to meld them together, making it seem like this feature had been there forever.





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| The Judges |



Top row, left to right: Landon Malave, Jake Bradley, Jonathan Marston
Bottom row, left to right: Eric Arntson, Sean Bell, Jennifer Zuri



The Hot Bench

Meet the judges on the 'Supreme Stream Court'

by **Jordan Morris**
Editor, POND Trade magazine

Known informally as the "Supreme Stream Court," we packed the project evaluation panel this year with six industry experts, including three past contest winners, several master pond builders, a wholesale distributor and koi farmer. Each judge reviewed blind entries and selected a winner and runner-up in each of the four categories — Formal Features & Fountains, Best Pondless, Most Naturalistic and Best Water Feature Under \$20,000.

To be considered eligible, projects must have been completed between Nov. 1, 2022 and Nov. 1, 2023. We accepted multiple entries from the same contractor; however, each project could only be submitted in one category for consideration. POND Trade magazine's editorial staff collected the judges' rankings for each of the four categories and calculated the winners.

The judges who served on this year's panel were:

Eric Arntson founded Stonebridge Landscape in 2003, with the goal of creating breathtaking outdoor spaces that make a lasting impression. His dedication to craftsmanship, simple flowing lines and use of natural material informed his unique organic style of landscape design for many years. He switched his business focus to exclusively water features in 2018, and together with his wife Ana, they have built a successful business, bringing the magic of flowing water to countless families throughout the years.

Sean Bell is the Eastern Regional Sales Manager for Atlantic-Oase. A true fish geek and water feature professional, he has spent the last 20 years training, educating and supporting contractors, distributors, and retailers in the green industry. Sean previously managed one of the largest aquarium stores in the Southeast that specialized in fish from all around the globe, including imported Japanese koi. When Sean is not working, he enjoys studying waterfall design while backpacking and camping.

Jake Bradley grew up in rural Michigan learn-

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ing to appreciate nature from an early age. He worked in landscaping as well in his family's business before finding new challenges at EasyPro in 2006. Jake works on the sales team as the project coordinator, and among other things, is responsible for analyzing landscape plans and blueprints to determine project needs and what equipment and features will give the best possible results for landscape contractors, pond builders and their customers.

Landon Malave is the owner of LCM Waterfalls & Ponds, previously known as LCM Landscape & Design. Operating out of Elbert, Colorado, he services the front range and is taking his efforts nationwide. He grew up on a farm in Eastern Colorado, earning his associate's degree in horticulture and a certificate in landscape design. He has been in business for more than 10 years and is excited about the future of building multiple businesses, honing in on his skills in the water feature industry. Landon lives on a tree farm with his wife and three children.

Jonathan Marston built his first water feature at the age of 18 for his grandparents in Massachusetts. After high school, he moved to British Columbia for a unique undergraduate opportunity that allowed him to study water features in one of the most scenic parts of North America. Upon graduating, he moved back to Boston and officially opened FallingWater Scapes in 2017, which has since become a Master Certified Aquascape Contractor and an award-winning water-feature company.

Jennifer Zuri is the marketing communications manager for Aquascape, Inc. where she began her career in water features in 2002. She authored Pond Builder's Guide to Break Even, serves as editor-in-chief for the Aquascape Lifestyles magazine and has written several water gardening articles for a variety of trade publications. A former president of the International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society (IWGS), Jennifer enjoys choosing waterlilies and aquatic plants for her 11-by-17-foot pond. ☞

Runners-Up

The Closest of Calls

Competitive runners-up trigger a tiebreaker

by **Jordan Morris**,
Editor, POND Trade magazine

What happens when two projects tie for first place? That's a tough question we had to answer this year for the first time in the contest's eight years. We ended up calling on our friend Tim Wood of Aquatic Edge Consulting, a three-time contest winner and past judge, to break the tie. (Yes, the rankings were THAT close!)

POND Trade magazine is proud to host the independent, unsponsored Water Artisans of the Year contest on an annual basis. This provides a level playing field for all contractors, regardless of company size or affiliation, and recognizes the year's most impressive projects that set the bar in pond construction. We'd like to send a huge thanks to all our judges who presided over this year's contest. Thanks to donations from all our applicants, we donated more than \$2,000 to St. Jude Children's Hospital on behalf of the global pond and water garden industry.

Now in its eighth year, the Water Artisans of the Year contest has become a celebration of our industry's elite construction projects. POND Trade magazine will start accepting entries for this year's contest later this fall. We'd love to feature your artistry on the pages of this magazine next year! ☞



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Runner-up Under \$20k



April Dugan
American Waterscapes
www.americanwaterscapes.com

Set amid an English-style garden, this 10-by-15-foot pond adds a subtle grace to the surrounding landscape. A patio bowl was lovingly carved to allow small rivulets of water to spill from its edge and act as a custom biofilter. At 30 inches deep, this wildlife pond hosts small fish, waterlilies and carnivorous plants. An intake bay was added to accommodate the heavy biological load from the crab apple that overhangs the pond.



Runner-up Best Pondless

Dan Johanson

Focal Point Features
www.focalpointfeatures.com

This mesmerizing 30-foot stream flows down a hill nestled between two oak trees. A gentle, low-profile spring pools up and cascades over the initial waterfall. A diverse combination of waterfalls and pooling areas concludes with a dramatic drop just steps away from the adjoining patio. Grasses, ivy and terrestrials soften the edges and add texture and color. Underwater lights accentuate the water's drama, reflecting a captivating dance among the overhead trees.



Runner-up Most Naturalistic

James Hiestand
DreamScapes Water Features
and Landscaping
www.dreamscapescometrue.com

An aura of peace envelops this 6-foot-tall, 70-foot-long new addition to a park in Simi Valley, California. This pondless waterfall appears as though nature created it centuries ago, with concrete-reinforced boulder walls and 75 tons of tan, brown and orange Calico stone harvested from a local quarry. An 8-foot-wide reflection pool at the foot of the falls is the perfect venue to sit and contemplate nature.



Runner-up Fountains & Formal Features

Shane Hemphill & Heath Webb
Art of the Yard
www.customwaterfeaturesdenver.com

This contemporary water feature was a complete rebuild of an outdoor fountain adjacent to a formal swimming pool. All the stones on the house were preexisting, so Art of the Yard had to produce an exact match to make the feature appear as though it was part of the original house construction. With multiple spills and falls, this formal fountain completes and elevates this already luxurious outdoor living space.



With a passion for perfection, Premier Ponds' head artist Kevin "Big Country" Lescallett finalizes the thundering cascade with the patio-viewing area in mind.



Pond on Steroids

Backyard koi pond gets massive makeover

by **Mark Pankowski,**
Premier Ponds

Back at a Sept. 2023 team dinner, Premier Ponds' owner "King" Mike Kurylo said he had an announcement. From his pocket he produced rough blueprints of a pond, but as we looked closer at the sketch, we all were in shock at the monstrous size relative to the home.

"The client asked for a 'pond on steroids,'" Mike explained. "We'll be starting in two weeks." The boys exploded in excitement.

Our client had an existing concrete-bottom fishpond with a few small koi and goldfish. He also had a massive backyard and, moreover, a huge hill that came steeply down to his patio — an aquatic artist's dream for water action.

Making the Dream Work

Finally, Day 1 came, as did a Sunbelt excavator! It's rare for us to utilize machines, but given the scope of the project, it would be necessary. Within a few hours, we had dug out the layout, a sprawling 20-by-12-foot footprint with 4 feet of depth. Carving out the hill, our waterfall artist Kevin "Big Country" Lescallett's head began to spin with the possibilities.

We dropped underlayment and our thick rubber liner, then installed key infrastructure: skimmers for filtration, dual biofalls and two fish tunnels for koi protection. Then our artists began rocking out the space using our signature Pennsylvania mountain stone. The creativity would be on full display for the next few days.

Having collaborated with Aquascape the

previous month for a shockingly similar project, Premier Ponds' Sam Wells worked tirelessly to strap boulder after boulder, which would be airlifted by a machine to the perfect location and position within the basin and waterfall. Operating the machine



Despite late-fall conditions, the team's excitement for the project powered them through over a week of hardcore stonework. This basin features multiple fish caves and an underwater patio.

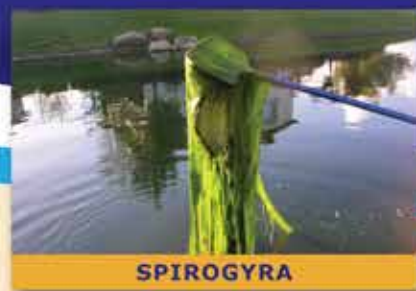
was our fellow contractor on this project, Travis, who skillfully lowered each stone with care. King Mike himself got in the machine for the very first time and was delighted at the seamless process.

However, it was Lescallett who truly shined within this build. As each rock was

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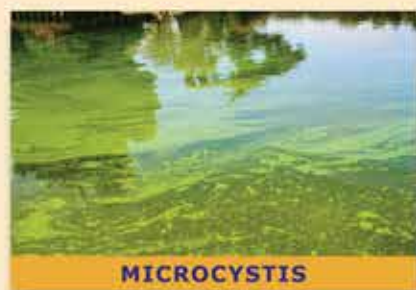
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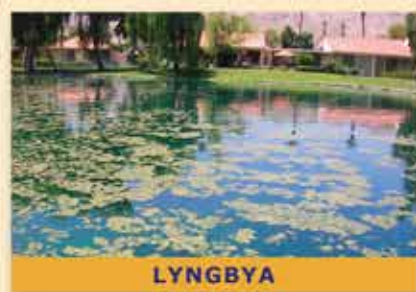
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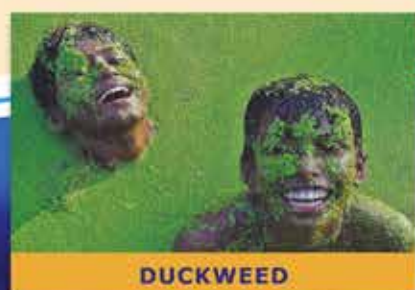
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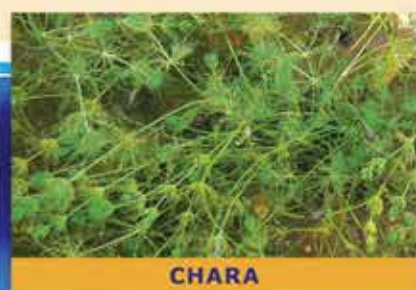
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Online icon Matthew 'Prime Time' Marsteller (left) poses proudly with the mystery waterfall, a buried gravity-fed pipe that creates an awesome aquatic illusion when flows seem to emerge from stone. This monumental backyard build (right) seems to have ushered in a new era at Premier, where five-star artistry has become the norm.

lowered slowly down to his jurisdiction, the aquatic icon masterfully planned and executed each drop point. We could tell he was creating something special for our awesome clients.

All the while, crew lead and technical specialist Andrew "Kuzi" Kuznetsov made crucial plumbing connections while fellow crew lead Roger Pope and new employee Eric Giron tag-teamed a retaining wall that led up to the pond. Our last crew lead Matthew "Prime Time" Marsteller handcrafted a gorgeous underwater patio, allowing our customer to walk down into his pond's deepest depths. Talk about "interactive" water features!

"Mystery" Waterfall

This new pond wasn't just spacious; it additionally had all the classic add-ons — underwater lights for nighttime enjoyment, aquatic plants for natural filtration and aerators for fish health in the warm months.

Our client even sprung for

one of our favorites — a gravity-fed "mystery" waterfall built by Marsteller. With plumbing inconspicuously running underground from the main waterfalls to a subtle crack in some stones below, the trickling stream of water seems to appear from nowhere. This is such a cool concept that continually delights clients and our team members alike!

The rocking process took about five days, as our creative team was working to craft a pond that was as functional and easy to maintain as it was aesthetically pleasing. We always build with longevity in mind. This pond has designated deep spots for dropping a pump to the lowest region when cleaning, and the fish tunnels' inner sections are just accessible enough to polish fully. (Much like a human that values privacy, koi prefer to poop in their tunnels.) Crystalline water is core to our team's idea of the perfect pond.

Magnum Opus

On Day 7, we revealed the waterfall, which was instantly met with excited howls and repeated screams of "Dude!" from our marketing guy Mark.

"Are you not entertained?!" King Mike exclaimed as Lescallett gazed upon what very well may be his magnum opus.

Lescallett's waterfall captivated our clients. They remarked that while they were aware of his artistic talents, the waterfall looks like it "belongs at a hotel or something!" The cascade was truly magnificent. Lescallett's intricate approach paid off with a mix of sheet-style waterfalls at the top and more crashing, thundering streams below. The whitewater's effect on the team was undeniable. (As the marketing guy, I always ask our crew members for postgame interviews. For this project, everyone's initial reaction was speechlessness — which is, honestly, understandable!)

Marsteller retrieved his brand-new

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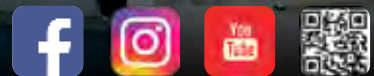
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koi sock for ethical fish transport and began loading the fish back into their brand-new habitat. You could tell their minds were blown — their home had suddenly grown tenfold! As they gracefully swam around their new ecosystem, there was a sense of pride among our crew. These koi will now enjoy long and healthy lives in their enormous new pond.

In the end, our clients were absolutely thrilled with the transformation, remarking that the original ask — a “pond on steroids” — had been fulfilled. The crew, meanwhile, spoke of how this project represented a “new era” that Premier Ponds was entering down here in the Washington, D.C. and Baltimore region. We’re pushing our creativity to the limit in order to embody the cutting edge of aesthetic waterscaping.

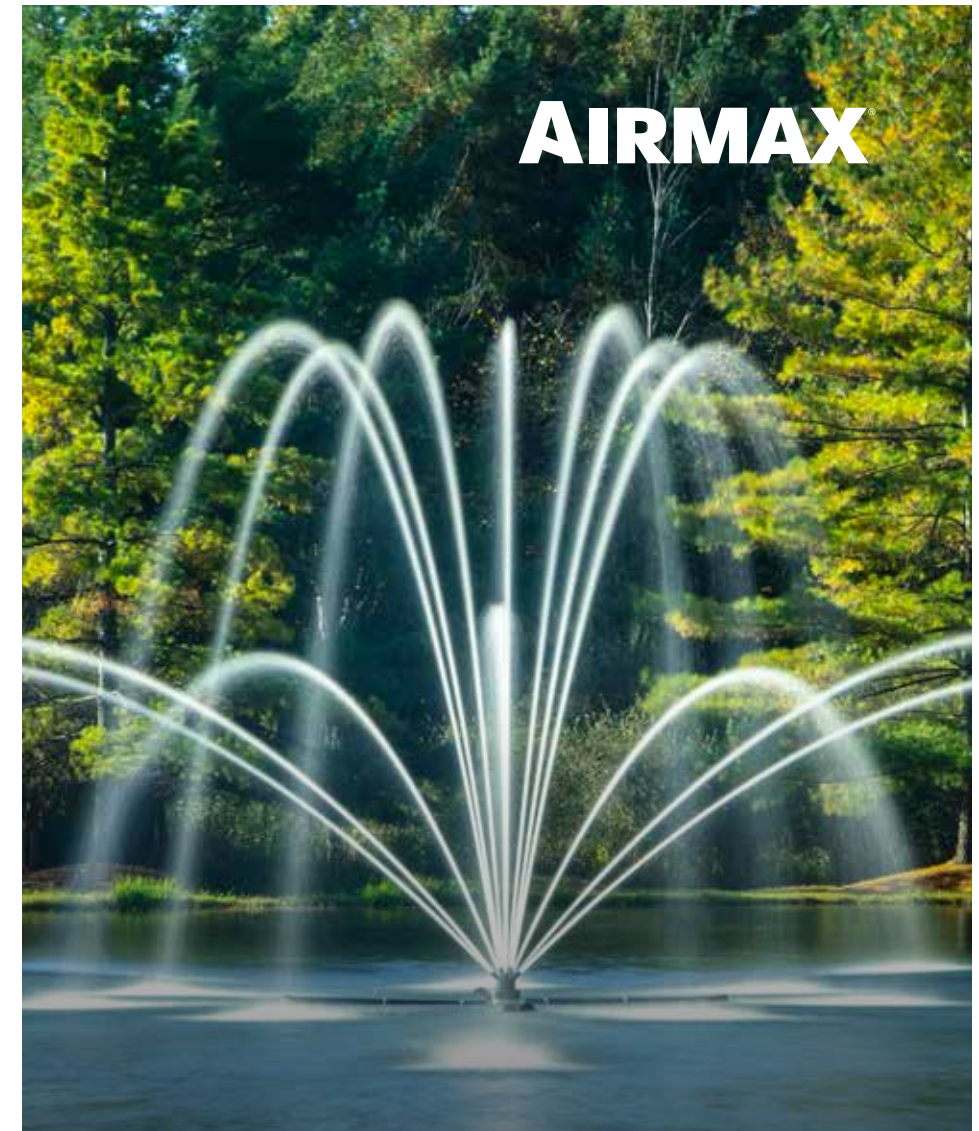
This huge pond may well be our project of the year, if not the crown jewel of our young staff’s work to date. We are extremely proud of this build! ☞

About the Author

From working at places like Geico, Gatorade, Dish Network and Yuengling, **Mark Pankowski** has a rich background in



brand strategy and digital media. But after arriving at Premier early in 2021, he realized that bringing the vivid world of “Premier Ponds” to the public was his true calling. A lifelong pond fanatic at heart, Mark’s energy and passion for the clients and crew alike has made him a brand ambassador for Premier. Mark lives to promote and highlight the incredible ongoing story of Premier Ponds & Outdoor Lighting — taking the small company from 800 subscribers to 170,000 in just over two years and earning the coveted Silver Play Button from YouTube.



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| Pond **Seasons** |

The Life Cycle of a Water Feature

Pond maintenance by the seasons

by Patrick Simmsgeiger,
Diversified Waterscapes, Inc.

As the seasons change throughout the year, all life adjusts in unique ways. Of course, the scope and magnitude of seasonal changes vary depending on the different locations and climates all over the world. As Shakespeare once said, “How many things by season season’d are, to their right praise and true perfection!”

Each season brings new challenges maintaining life. These seasonal rhythms affect all aspects of your pond as well. It is imperative that a pond keeper understands the maintenance adjustments as the seasons change. Every part of the ecosystem of the pond is life that must be maintained for its survival. The water, microscopic life, fish, and aquatic and bordering plants must all be considered according to climate changes.

Winter Dormancy

Depending on the significance of the climate change, the maintenance needs of the pond will differ. In a more drastic change of season, the maintenance falls to almost nothing. The fish will move to the deepest part of the pond and huddle together because the earth helps warm them.

In the early fall, you should feed your fish a bit extra because

they are preparing for winter hibernation. Be sure to monitor the water temperature. A pond water thermometer is priceless for proper pond care. When the water temperature drops below 50°F, you no longer need to feed the fish. If the temperature of the pond rises above 50°F, you can feed your fish wheat germ. If your pond freezes over, the fish can die from lack of oxygen.

It is a good idea to get a floating de-icer to keep an area of the pond free of ice. This will allow for an exchange of gases. Do not break the ice! If you do, the shock waves can possibly kill your fish.

Spring into Action

In the spring, your pond water begins to warm, and you see your pond coming back to life. This is an important time to pick up on the maintenance routine to prepare the water, fish and other aquatic life for warmer weather.

Anything you did to prepare your pond for winter can be undone now.

Each season brings new challenges maintaining life. These seasonal rhythms affect all aspects of your pond as well.

Turn your pump back on if you did not have it running. It is time to start feeding your fish again. Make sure that you start out feeding them cold-weather food if the water temperature is a constant 50°F. Once the water temperature reaches 60°F, you can begin the full season feeding program.

It is spring and time to “garden” your pond. You should clear away all the dead leaves and debris that have accumulated over the winter. You can use a skimmer type of net to do this, and it will allow you to scoop up leaves on the bottom of the pond. There are products that will hasten the natural process of decomposition of this debris. A pond vacuum can be used to remove debris and muck from the bottom

of the pond. You should use a cleaning system that does not remove much of the water. As the weather continues to warm, you can add appropriate plants according to the warming process.

A Long Summer

“And so with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow in fast movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer.”

- F. Scott Fitzgerald

There is something about summertime that brings out the beauty of all living things. Your pond, perfectly maintained, can be the peaceful, magical place of beauty to retreat to where the only sounds necessary are those of the water and creatures around it. The key word to make your pond that place is “maintained” — all the aquatic life fully awake, active and growing. The fish need to be fed between one and three times per day. Do not overfeed them. Feed the fish no

more than they can eat in five minutes.

All the methods of maintaining a healthy pond are in full swing. With the warm weather, nuisances like algae will take over if not controlled. It is important to maximize your aeration. Warm water holds less oxygen, yet the fish use more oxygen in warm water. There must be plenty of aeration going 24 hours a day, all seven days of the week.

Not only is weed and algae control important, but pest control is also at its peak in the summer. Critters from land, air and water will find their way to your pond and claim it as theirs if not controlled. The water quality is the single most important aspect of a healthy pond. Natural waters are never pure, though, because water is a powerful solvent. Water dissolves at least a portion of every gas or solid it contacts, and some of these dissolved substances affect the water’s pH. Pond water should have adequate levels of alkalinity and hardness for the species under culture, and those levels should not be widely disproportionate. Biological condition through beneficial bacteria, appropriate aquatic plants and fish will maintain the quality of your pond water. Filtration with sand, wetlands and the use of a biofilter are very beneficial to water quality.

Summer may be the busiest time for a pond keeper, but it can also be the most enjoyable when your pond is well maintained.

Falling Back

The vibrant colors of fall are stunning. Unfortunately, those beautiful colors end up floating on top of your pond. With the temperatures beginning to drop, it is time to switch to cold-temperature beneficial bacteria and reduce your fish-feeding regimen.

With each new season comes a different method of pond maintenance. Make your life a lot easier by thinning out your aquatic plants in the fall instead of waiting until the end of winter! During the winter,

your aquatic plants focus all their energy on their root system mass. Your aquatic plants may turn yellow or brown as they go dormant. They are not dying. Trim back the yellow and brown to prevent debris from building in the bottom of your pond.

Those beautiful, colorful leaves that are floating on your pond will decay and throw off the ecological balance of your water. It is important to remove them from the pond to avoid that consequence. You can use a net to skim them off of the top of the pond as they fall. This can become a tedious daily chore. Skimmers are not designed for this much debris. Heavy leaf fall can clog a skimmer several times a day. The most efficient way to maintain the removal of so many leaves would be to install leaf netting. You should reduce the circulation of the pond water when the temperature drops into the 40s. You should also turn down the water flow.

In order to have a pond that is beautiful and healthy year-round, one must understand the seasonal maintenance needs. Education is key to this. Get to know the needs of your pond and aquatic life so that as each season comes and goes, you have your beautiful, peaceful place of nature to enjoy! ☺

About the Author

Patrick Simmsgeiger is the president of Diversified Waterscapes Inc. (DWI), a certified lake management company and manufacturer



of aquatic products for 35 years and counting. Based in Southern California, he is an expert in all stages of aquatic treatment, from product development and manufacturing to application and treatment.

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Oh My **Gourd!**

The science & sensation of growing giant pumpkins

by **George Janowiak,**
Gem Ponds

Why grow giant pumpkins? I ask myself this every year. I started gardening more than 30 years ago. This is about the same time I built my first pond. At first, it was to have some pumpkins around Halloween and take pictures with the kids. I didn't want to go out and buy a

big pumpkin. Back then, it was hard to find a pumpkin 100 pounds or more. They were few and far in between — and also expensive!

I decided I would just grow one. How hard could it be? (Pretty damn hard, actually.) As it turns out, only a couple of varieties are genetically capable of that. I ended





The seedlings get potted up a couple of times before going into the temporary greenhouse. The plant itself grows fast — up to 1 foot a day in all directions. Huge leaves are like solar panels for the pumpkin's growth.



An overview of the patch — it's at about full size to support the beast's pollination time.

up finding Dills Atlantic giant pumpkin seeds, a strain that was patented in 1979 by Howard Dill, "The Pumpkin King." He broke the world record in 1980 with a 459-pound pumpkin. I figured I would write him a letter asking for growing tips or possibly some seeds from his pumpkins.

There were barely any computers or internet back then. If you wanted seeds, you had to write letters to growers requesting them. Howard sent seeds and some tips. I was excited and wanted more information. I looked for books. I ended up finding *How-to Grow World Class Giant Pumpkins* by Don Langevin 1993. I must have read that book a hundred times. In 1994, with my seeds and book in hand, I set out to grow something big!

Need for Seed

Seed selection is one of the biggest things that can make or break a season. Back in the '90s, there was a limited selection of seeds and pumpkin growers

growing them. Today, there are thousands of giant pumpkin seeds available to choose from, with more growers getting involved in the hobby every year. It's all about trying to find the right seed genetically to grow the big one.

Most competitive growers will pick seeds that are "proven," which means they have a track record of growing pumpkins between 1,500 – 2,000 pounds or more. At auction, some of these seeds will sell for hundreds of dollars. You can also pick a rookie seed, a seed that has great lineage or weighed heavy the year it was grown. First-year seeds can still be typically found for free if you contact the grower.

All seeds have a hierarchical tree, or a lineage dating back years with pumpkins that were crossed to produce it. A grower can look at the hierarchy tree and see what traits the pumpkin they are growing will have, including color, wall thickness and weight.

I start my seeds in mid-April. After the seeds have sprouted, they may get potted up a couple of times. The roots

grow very fast, and you don't want them getting root bound. I target the first week in May for planting in the pumpkin patch. The weather can still



be cool and wet. I put up mini greenhouses that are 8 by 10 feet. This keeps the soil and air temperatures warmer, while protecting small plants from the elements.



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My daughters enjoyed my 215 lb. pumpkin that I grew in 1995. It could have fit inside my 1,807 ½-pounder!

Patch Work

Prior to the plants going into the patch, I have my soil tested. This is a must to know what you are starting with. Otherwise, you are starting the season blind. You will find out how much, or how little major nutrients are in the soil. Cation exchange capacity (CEC), pH, organic content and micronutrients are also key. The lab will help you decipher the results. You can then adjust your fertilization program for the season based on the results. Basically, you need to become a scientist of your soil. I add compost every year to keep my soil fertile and healthy.

I have two pumpkin patches — one at my house and one at our shop — that are 30 by 30 feet each. One plant will encompass this area; it will support just one pumpkin. Most competitive growers give 800 to 1,000 square feet per plant. The plant will root and feed wherever the vines grow.

I try to pollinate the pumpkin in mid-June. The

plant has both male and female flowers. All pumpkins are female. I don't leave pollination up to the bees! I select male flowers the night before and cover them with plastic cups. The female flower is tied shut to ensure that the cross will be pure and not contaminated by insects. It also keeps the



flowers dry in case of rain. I try to use, if available, two to three male flowers to one female. Male flowers are more abundant than females.

And Then There's Halloween...



Light, cameras, action! Halloween is always fun around our house. I have some pumpkins professionally carved and others hacked up in a scary way. I have made pumpkin waterfalls and fountains in the past. The display is different every year.

I might just get a couple of good chances at pollinating before July 4., and I want the actual pumpkin to grow in the 100-day range. So, mid-June is crucial for pollination. We harvest at the end of September for the pumpkin weigh-off.

Tip the Scale

In 1996, I grew a pumpkin that weighed 477 pounds. That was a large pumpkin back then! It took all season to get that size. Today, if you want to be competitive at the weigh off, it needs to weigh that or more after 30 days of pollination. Nothing grows faster than a giant pumpkin, I'm convinced of that!

This is how you get hooked into the hobby. At day 30, the pumpkin should be doing at least 30 pounds per day

as a benchmark. The 1,807 ½-pound pumpkin I grew this year hit 50 pounds a day at its peak.

Some growers use digital platform scales. For now, I still rely on flexible tape measures and reference charts to calculate daily gains and final weight. Pumpkins are around 90% water. So, you need to water a lot. Every pumpkin patch has a different soil composition. I ended up watering about 100 gallons a day or more during peak pumpkin growth. At my home patch, I pump warmer, nutrient-rich water from my pond or bog and stored it in large containers. Small amounts of fertilizer are added every time I water.

Don't just grab the miracle grow off the shelf and go at it. Too much chemical fertilizer at once is the worst

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thing you can put on the plant. The mixture is then sprayed overhead once or twice a day. Too much water or rain can be problematic. You need to find the right balance of rain, water and fertilizer, and then dial it in.

Insecticides and fungicides need to be used throughout the season as well. Insects and disease can ruin the season fast if you don't stay on top of it. I inspect the plants daily for both. I spray various fungicides and insecticides once a week throughout the season.

Petal to the Metal

Several things need to happen to give your pumpkin room for rapid expansion. I often lay a bed of sand down and belt material that is used in paper mills. Both help keep the bottom of the pumpkin dry and protect it from mice (or anything else that wants to burrow in from

the bottom). Vines are pruned and trimmed away to allow for future growth. I cover the small pumpkins with laundry baskets to protect them from squirrels and raccoons. I have lost early pumpkins to both if they are not covered.

As the pumpkins grow, I erect small tents to cover them. The tents keep the pumpkins shaded from the sun and dry from rain. Sheets and blankets can also be used for protection. As the pumpkin grows, the vine growth will slow down. The pumpkin will demand most of the energy the plant can offer. The plant itself is misted with cool water or covered with shade cloth on hot days. Leaf's can wilt and burn up on hot days. If they do, they are not producing efficiently. Every leaf counts for pound producing power.

I begin measuring the pumpkins' circumference 10 days after pollina-



Pumpkin rigging (top) with the crew. Family group picture (bottom) at the weigh-off.

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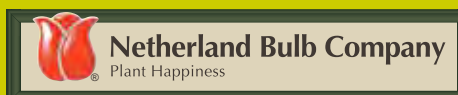
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tion. I measure my pumpkins in the morning. They put on the majority of weight at night. In the daytime, the plant makes sugars through photosynthesis and stores them at night. Weight benchmarks are important at day 20 and 30. You should be able to tell if you have a big one around these dates by comparing to your past records or published 2,000-pound pumpkin growth rates.

This is the most exciting and stressful time for pumpkin growing. I have cut pumpkins off the vine at this time that don't measure up. I have also had pumpkins split and look as if they shattered in the morning. Sometimes they grow too fast for their own good!

In July and August, most of the weight will be put on. I hope for a warm and drier September. A cool and a wet ending to the season does not help the pumpkin put on the weight it needs for possibly a personal best or winning the weigh-off.

The Big Reveal

Harvest day is one day prior to the weigh-off. It is a holiday, or an easy workday is scheduled. My employees, custom pallets, lifting rigs, skid steers, trucks and a good plan are all needed for loading and unloading the pumpkins.

If I'm lucky I have two to load.

There are no guarantees in pumpkin growing. All could be lost at this point. So, it is somewhat of a victory getting a pumpkin that is not damaged to the scale. Growing a personal best, not necessarily winning the weigh-off, is most important to me. Pumpkins will be disqualified or marked as "exhibition only" if they are cracked or damaged to the cavity of the pumpkin. All pumpkins are inspected at the weigh-off for these defects.

At our weigh-offs we typically have 15 to 20 pumpkins. It's also a time to reconnect with other growers. We talk about the trials and tribulations of the season — what worked or didn't work. Some I have known for almost 30 years and have become great friends. I have also seen a lot of growers come and go. It's a tough hobby with a regimented schedule. It will drive growers away if they have no success or get burned out.

After the weigh-off, my pumpkins are set up as a display in front of my house. Other growers will sell them off. You can expect to pay \$1 or more per pound for a giant pumpkin if you can find a grower willing to part with theirs. I get joy out of having them carved and displayed. Hundreds of people stop by to take pictures and ask questions. Halloween is a pretty crazy time at our house! The fire department

stopped by one year because of all the fog my fog machine had generated and all people who had gathered. (They stayed and handed out candy.)

Every year I still ask myself if I should grow again. When I grew my 159-pound pumpkin in 1994, I got hooked. Then I wanted to grow to 500, 1,000, 1,500 ... and now 2,000 pounds in sight in for 2024. So, I will grow on until I reach at least 2,000 pounds!

If you would like to try growing in 2024, contact me at George@gemponds.com. I can get you more growing tips and seeds to get you started in the hobby. 🍂

About the Author

George Janowiak is a

Master Certified Aquascape Contractor. For the last 20 years, he has been designing and installing some of Chicagoland's finest custom ponds. A professional pond-building company, Gem Ponds Inc. has installed over 500 water features. They specialize in residential sales and service of ponds and pond-
less water features.



My 995-lb. pumpkin won the Howard Dill Award for prettiest pumpkin and is just about the biggest pumpkin I could fit in the back of my pickup.

2023 IWGS New Waterlily Competition

Celebrating 25 years of breathtaking blooms

by **Suzanne Boom**,
IWGS

The International Waterlily & Water Gardening Society (IWGS) is proud to announce the results of the 2023 New Waterlily Competition (NWC).

The NWC was held this year for the 25th time. It has been one of the flagship events of the society since 1997. The competition is open to all hybridizers, and this year, contestants from six different countries submitted their new waterlily hybrid for evaluation in one of the following five categories: Hardy, Tropical Day Blooming, Hardy Intersubgeneric (ISG), Tropical ISG and Tropical Night Blooming Waterlily.

Double Feature

To ensure the best conditions for all categories of waterlilies, we opted to divide the competition between 2 different growing locations. The hardy and hardy ISG waterlilies were grown in a more temperate site at Longwood Gardens (Kennett Square, Pennsylvania) with Senior Horticulturist Suzanne Boom and Horticultural Specialty Grower Tim Jennings, while the tropical waterlily categories continued to be grown out at Naples Botanical Garden (Naples, Florida) with Curator of Special Collections Matthew Herrman.

The entries were evaluated by an international panel of judges on the

quality of the flowers and foliage as well as the general impression and uniqueness of the plant. These evaluations were made based on the grower's notes and photos collected over the eight-week observation period. Among the judges were professional waterlily growers from botanic gardens and plant nurseries, as well as hybridizers and experienced hobbyists.

Hardy Waterlilies

1st place: N.'Golden Gate' -



Nymphaea 'Golden Gate'



Nymphaea 'Treesuwan'



Nymphaea 'Valentine's Day'



Best Overall New Waterlily



Top to bottom: Nymphaea 'Wichitra' (Best Overall New Waterlily), Nymphaea 'Zi Lan', and Nymphaea 'Chaiyaphum'.



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Above, left to right: Nymphaea 'U Bon Thep', Nymphaea 'Jardin Nelumbo', and Nymphaea 'Violet Beauty'.

Khwanyok Khamklang, Thailand
 2nd place: N. 'Treesuwan' -
 Somchan Treesuwan, Thailand
 3rd place: N. 'Valentine's Day'
 - Pornchai Sukkasemsamranjit,
 Thailand

Tropical Day Blooming Waterlilies

1st place: N. 'Wichitra' – Wipawan
 Sriuram, Thailand

2nd place: N. 'Zi Lan' - Weiqiang
 Yuan, China
 3rd place: N.' Chaiyaphum' - Arun
 Kobkaew, Thailand

Hardy Intersubgeneric Waterlilies

1st place: N. 'U Bon Thep' - Prajak
 Tamrarueng, Thailand
 2nd place: N. 'Jardin Nelumbo' -
 Florian Henaux, France

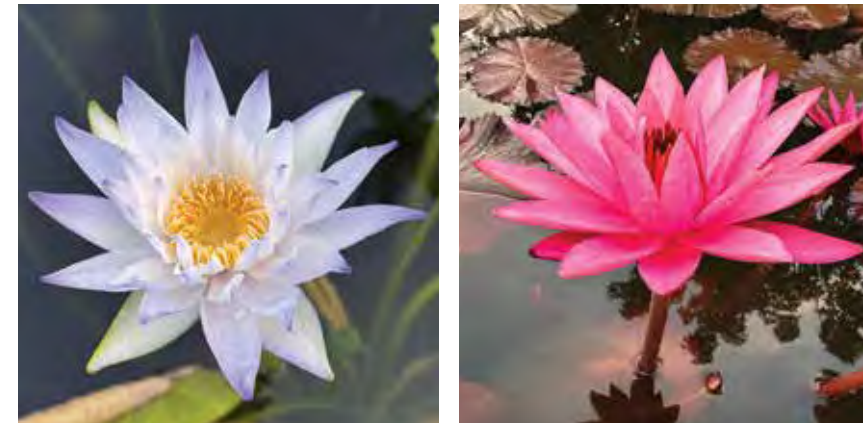
3rd place: N. ' Violet Beauty' -
 Andreas Protopapas, Cyprus

Tropical Night Blooming Waterlilies

1st place: N. 'Papasarathorn' -
 Pang U Bon, Thailand

Tropical Intersubgeneric Waterlilies

1st place: N. 'New Poem of the



Nymphaea 'New Poem of the Nile' (left), Nymphaea 'Papasarathorn' (right).


Nile' - Zijun Li, China

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all the hybridizers for offering their creations for evaluation. We offer our sincere gratitude to the judges who volunteered their time to examine these hybrids and made many tough decisions. Our thanks also go out to those who made donations to the IWGS in support of

the competition.

Not least of all, we wish to extend our gratitude to Naples Botanical Garden and Longwood Gardens for hosting this year's competition and providing the location and staff to ensure its success. We could not have done this without you.

If you would like to see past winners or submit your hybrid into the 2024 competition, please visit iwgs.org/new-waterlily-competition/. 

2023 New Waterlily Competition Judges

- Andre Leu (Regeneration International, Australia)
- Danny Cox (Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden USA)
- James Allison (Aquapic Water Garden Solutions, UK)
- Jon Sander (Glenstone Museum, USA)
- Kathy Sassoon (Leuca Creek, Australia)
- Marc Hachadourian (New York Botanical Garden, USA)
- Nopchai Chansilpa (Thailand)
- Rob Sheldon (Latour-Marliac, France)
- Severine Lyssens-Danneboom (Aqua, Belgium)
- Stacie Zelenka (PondScapes, USA)
- Steve Hampson (USA)
- Weerada Tanaakarapakin (Buafah Garden, Thailand)

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| Language of **Koi** |



Kloubec Koi Farm utilizes both mud ponds and three indoor koi houses for domestic koi production.

Domestic is Not a Dirty Word!

The risks of importing koi from overseas

by **Ellen Kloubec,**
Kloubec Koi Farm

There's a prevailing misconception that domestic koi are of lower quality than their Japanese counterparts. However, it's important to note that both domestic and Japanese koi originate from the same roots — challenging the notion of inherent superiority. Domestic koi often match or surpass the quality of imported koi, regardless of the national origin of the imports.

Domestic koi breeders in the United States are focusing on exciting progressions in koi breeding previously frowned upon by rigid offshore criteria. Many advances are being realized in the production of customer favorites, such as sparkly Gin Rin types, graceful and flowing fins of butterfly varieties and other rare and unique types that your customers are seeking.

The “Domestic” Dispute

When characterizing koi, the term “domestic” serves as an adjective indicating that the koi is native to, bred in and currently residing in a specific



Staff at Kloubec Koi Farm select high-end koi for sale.

country, making it not of foreign origin. Additionally, it implies that the koi is tame and under human care.

On the other hand, the designation “import” signifies that the koi was bred elsewhere and imported into a country



Kloubec Koi Farm ensures their domestic koi health (left) with documentation from USDA labs. The farm has 300,000 gallons (right) indoors for raising beautiful American koi.

Importing

The process of international shipping poses significant challenges and complexities, especially when it comes to importing koi fish. Among the primary concerns is the transmission of diseases, with Koi Herpes Virus (KHV) and Spring Viremia of Carp (SVC) two notable examples. The introduction of these diseases to new populations is a serious concern, closely monitored by the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Navigating the legal landscape of

importing live koi is no small feat. Strict guidelines, including health inspections, permits, licenses and documentation, must be adhered to. Any lapse in compliance with these requirements can lead to legal repercussions, potential delays in receiving the imported koi or even confiscation of the livestock.

Additionally, the stress experienced by koi during their extensive journey cannot be underestimated or overlooked. The extensive time spent in shipping boxes traveling from the breeder's farm by truck, and then through airports

and U.S. Customs and U.S. Fish & Wildlife inspections, can last several days. This process always subjects the fish to heavy stress. Poor water quality and a potential lack of oxygen during transit leads to increased mortalities and outbreaks following their arrival. The intricacies of international koi importation demand careful consideration and meticulous adherence to regulations to mitigate these inherent risks.

Cost is another huge factor when importing koi. Realize that importing koi from Japan or other countries can be very expensive due to shipping costs, licensing and permitting, import taxes, quarantine expenses, etc. The logistics



Kohaku, a high-quality American koi raised at Kloubec Koi Farm.

of arranging international transportation and ensuring the wellbeing of the fish during transit can be challenging, not to mention the extensive mark-ups and other costs imposed by the dealer-broker. The language

barrier further complicates matters, often requiring solutions to overcome translation challenges.

Critical Considerations

If you decide to take on the inherent risks of importing koi, the following considerations are critical and directly affect potential koi sales and the koi-keeping hobby as a whole.

Be sure to obtain a health certificate from the breeder. A valid and current fish health inspection report should be available. Make sure that the fish and the premises are free of catastrophic diseases such as KHV, SVC, Infectious Pancreatic Necrosis (IPN) and Epizootic Ulcerative

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USDA APHIS Vet Training at Kloubec Koi Farm; Continuing our Koi Health Commitment

In the summer of 2023, Kloubec Koi Farm was again honored to host the USDA APHIS Fin Fish FAAD investigation training program. USDA APHIS veterinarians from all across the country and Canada participated in multi-day training exercises at the Kloubec farm and USDA laboratory. Along with workshops the training curriculum included a "mock-investigation" of a fish disease outbreak. Activities pertinent to the course included proper implementation of PPE (personal protection equipment), site evaluation, specimen collection and preservation, and interviews of the fish production team, as part of a simulated outbreak and investigation.

An APHIS veterinarian is a veterinarian approved and accredited

by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to perform certain tasks related to the health and certification of animals such as koi. These veterinarians play a crucial role in ensuring the health and welfare of animals, and their evaluation and certification add a level of professionalism and reliability to the health assessment of koi. FAAD is an acronym for Foreign Aquatic Animal Disease investigation, a USDA APHIS program to prevent and control aquatic animal diseases in fin fish species, including koi. Obtaining a Fish Health Inspection Report from a USDA APHIS vet and lab is the only way to know for sure that the koi offered for sale are healthy and KHV-free.



Develop a well-thought-out emergency response plan for potential disease outbreaks or unforeseen circumstances. This plan should outline protocols for isolating and treating affected fish and notifying relevant authorities.

Syndrome (EUS). Ensure that the testing was conducted by a qualified laboratory, such as an APHIS-accredited veterinarian, and approved to do so in support of Export Health Certification of Aquaculture Species. The common visual inspection by a dealer is inadequate to guard against disease or to guarantee the good health of any koi. Verify the completeness of all required documentation, including import permits, customs paperwork and certificates of origin. Strict compliance with local and international regulations is essential to

prevent legal issues and guarantee the safety of the imported fish.

Implement a thorough quarantine process upon receiving imported koi. Fish from multiple farms must always be quarantined separately, meaning in totally detached systems. This practice can help prevent the introduction of potential pathogens and diseases into existing populations and ensures that any health issues are addressed before the fish are released into ponds or tanks with other fish.

Develop a well-thought-out emergency response plan for



This is a sample of high-quality koi and butterfly koi available from domestic sources.

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potential disease outbreaks or unforeseen circumstances. This plan should outline protocols for isolating and treating affected fish and notifying relevant authorities. Also implement biosecurity measures to prevent the introduction of pathogens. This may include restricting access to the facility, requiring staff to use designated clothing and equipment and disinfecting equipment and vehicles.

Finally, ensure that your collaboration involves trustworthy dealers and breeders. Be vigilant against those who might attempt to overcharge for subpar fish. It's crucial to partner with individuals who share a genuine passion for maintaining the health and quality of koi, rather than those who solely prioritize their own interests.

Home Field Advantage

For retailers, domestic koi stand out as the top choice due to their inherent disease resistance and stunning aesthetics. Bred and nurtured in local environments, domestic koi exhibit a heightened adaptability to our climate and water conditions. This adaptability often translates to hardier and more robust fish that are better suited to the specific nuances of the region's environment. Their upbringing in specific regional environments often contributes to the development of resilient immune systems, making them less susceptible to prevalent diseases in the area.

Opting for domestically bred koi reduces the risk of disease outbreaks, lessening the need for extensive treatments and medications commonly associated with imported varieties. This is particularly beneficial for pond owners, koi enthusiasts and retailers who may lack the expertise to identify and effectively treat diseases or infections that could accompany imported koi into their tanks or ponds. Choosing domestic koi not only ensures the beauty of these fish but also promotes a healthier and more manageable aquatic environ-

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ment and koi retail venue.

High-Quality Domestic Koi

Kloubec Koi Farm has been in operation since 1981, breeding and raising domestic koi for many decades and providing extensive knowledge and expertise in koi husbandry. The koi raised at the Kloubec farm in Amana, Iowa, are direct descendants of Japanese breeder stock, which were all hand-selected years ago by koi-breeding experts to achieve the most desirable traits in the offspring, such as ideal body conformation, depth of pigmentation, pattern development and much more.

While creating a wide selection of koi varieties, including standard, butterfly and rare varieties, our farm prioritizes the cultivation of robust, lively and meticulously nurtured koi. We take biosecurity seriously to minimize the risk of introducing diseases. Implementation of strict protocols prevents the possible spread of pathogens and ensures our koi

are healthy and disease-free.

This comprehensive regimen encompasses water quality management across both outdoor mud ponds and indoor facilities; meticulously monitoring oxygen concentration, pH levels, temperature, and ammonia content; and employing advanced water filtration systems. Even the shipping departments are strictly maintained for optimum koi health and comfort while in house and during transport to dealer locations all across the country.

Kloubec diligently keeps detailed breeding records for each spawning season and submits livestock samples throughout each year to USDA APHIS labs for health screening and disease-free certification. Fish health inspection reports proving virus-free status are always available at Kloubec Koi Farm.

Choosing domestic koi eliminates the associated risks of importing, offering peace of mind to both business owners and koi enthusiasts. Many hobbyists and

koi sellers value the chance to contribute to their local koi breeding community, actively supporting local businesses. Opting to showcase beautiful and healthy domestic koi in your store not only promotes American domestic koi breeders but also contributes to the growth of the U.S. economy. ☞

About the Author

Ellen Kloubec and her husband

Myron began their aquaculture business in 1981, and their farm consists of 80 acres of mud ponds. Together with their son Nick, they raise and supply healthy and hardy koi to wholesale customers throughout the USA and Canada. Ellen loves all things koi.

www.klubeckoi.com



| Podcast Connection |

Create Your Own **Pond-cast**

The best advertising bang for your aquatic buck

by **Eric Triplett**,

The Pond Digger

I believe that podcasting is, hands down, the No. 1 smartest way to build your personal brand equity and blow up your content marketing efforts. Building your own podcast to promote your business can be a simple, inexpensive way to get your company name at the forefront of people's minds in your local community and across the country.

Defining and promoting what your company stands for and the skills and values that differentiate you from everyone else is what personal branding is all about. You want people to know that when it comes to building or servicing ponds, you are the go-to company for your area. Not only that, but you are also the most knowledgeable company around, you are reliable, you are trustworthy, your crew is trustworthy, you stand behind your work, and you and your crew are neat and clean up after yourselves. You are a trend setter, and you know how to keep up with the times.

Personal branding in the pond world is even more important because the standout companies are usually the ones that get recommended. Personal recommendations are absolutely the least expensive way to advertise, and because recommendations usually come from a trusted source, it's better than conventional advertising. Your company starts a step ahead because the potential client already trusts your business. After all, they have been referred by a friend or family member they trust, and your podcast helps to demonstrate these attributes.

Why Start a Podcast?

Podcasting is a simple way to let people get to know your company at a personal level so you can help build your personal brand. Podcast referrals can become similar to a personal referral because the listeners feel like they are getting to know you at a deeper level. Sharing your knowledge, advice and thoughts in this very personal setting helps.

This is also a great way to stay in front of your existing clients — not just the prospects looking

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Talks with some of the profession's greatest: (left to right) Randy Stewart, Pondliner; Kelly Billing, Water Becomes a Garden; and Anthony Archer-Wills.

to hire you. We hear from existing clients constantly about how much they like the newest podcast episode. These same clients can be interviews for your podcast episodes.

Being on the forefront of industry standards and staying relevant to the changes in the pond industry is important. Knowledge builds trust. If you can't answer questions about a bottom drain for someone, or you don't understand proper flow rates for settlement tanks or waterfall filters, people will not want to put their trust in your company.

Understanding fish needs and health is also hugely important, as people will have problems with their fish, and they need to know that they can rely on you to help. They can't just run their favorite koi to the local vet. (Maybe even interview a koi vet!)

Trust is a huge part of personal branding. Once you have your client and their friends trusting your knowledge, work ethic, reliability and support, you are well on your way. Podcasting is an easy way to spread this information. Releasing weekly episodes for your audience demonstrates discipline and consistency in your brand.

Digital Connection

Podcasts are becoming more popular every day since they began 2004. Podcasts are a great way to connect with people — especially those who are trapped in a car for two or more hours a day commuting to and from work. Sharing your stories, experience and knowledge on a podcast allows people to get to know the real person behind the company. Letting potential clients get to know you in this more personal setting is a great way to build trust. Podcasts allow you to step

outside of the rigid, professional zone of an interview and enter the area of a friend-to-friend conversation.

The audience becomes the friend you are speaking to. Let your listeners experience your emotions. When you get into great interviews and conversations, you'll be laughing, passionately sharing your opinions on important subject matter. Don't be surprised when you find yourself choked up and emotionally affected by your conversations.

Your audience wants to experience this side of you. They want to know you're human, just like them. A podcast has a unique and special way of sharing the tone of your voice. The three elements of communication are 7% words you say, 38% tone of your voice and 55% body language. The sound of your voice has a massive impact on your audience. Let them hear you.

Launch Tips

Launching a podcast allows you to speak to your target audience. Hopefully as an established business, you have that well in hand. Focus your podcast on what you specialize in so you can speak with confidence on the subject. You want to be able to give your listeners value from your podcasts so they will continue to listen to you and recommend your podcast to their friends. Record solocasts sharing exciting projects, emotional experiences and challenges that you've had to overcome.

The recording equipment does not have to cost you an arm and a leg. We use an iPhone and an app called Motiv or a good computer with a professional microphone. Then, we send the recorded file to a company that edits it for us. Our investment was very minimal to get started.

Once you have your equipment, your train of thought and a quiet space to record in, get several podcasts completed before you make them public. Make sure that you are consistent with your personal branding, and you stay on episode topic. Share your knowledge and allow people to begin to feel as if they are in a personal relationship with you. This camaraderie will go a long way. I can't stress how important it is to share thoughtful, interesting topics that you are knowledgeable in so you sound confident.

You can also have guest speakers such as industry experts, previous clients with fun and interesting projects, and even friends in other fields who have some relevance to your work. I recommend that once you have recorded some episodes and you are ready to go public, share it on all of your social media to help boost your podcast. I suggest you drop an episode once a week, so if you have eight episodes ready to go, you have a two-month jump. Guests typically want to share your podcast to their coworkers, friends and family, which can help bring more listeners to you and awareness to your brand.

Social Media Leverage

Episode or show notes — a synopsis of the episode — can also be used on social media to promote the podcast. They also will help with search engine optimization (SEO) on your website, too. Weekly episode releases give you an advertising outlet, that is sharing knowledge on a topic you are an expert in. This is raising your brand awareness and soon people will recognize you as an expert in your field and be waiting for your weekly release.

Encouraging your audience to interact with you through listener feedback and social media by sharing your podcast

helps your podcast become more well known. This makes sure they are understanding the branding you are promoting — your knowledge, reliability, follow through and ability to solve their problems. You can do this by sharing previous clients' stories, both success and failures. (It is important to be honest, which will definitely include failures.)

Podcasting can open doors within the pond industry. Collaborations and partnerships with influencers can help with your personal branding. Well recognized industry experts and influencers appearing on your podcast give you more credibility. This helps build your personal brand as the guy with the knowledge and connections in your area. We have had experts from many fields on our show — not just the pond industry — but these people had relatable content. Guests who share the episode they appeared on will help your podcast grow in listeners and allow you to interview bigger guests.

Our podcasts have two followings: contractors and pond lovers. We work

tirelessly to try to make sure our content is valuable to both of them. Interviewing our favorite manufacturer or koi breeder and other things we are passionate about are valuable to our target audience because they share the same interests we do.

Curate Your Content

We have interviewed people about body language, personality traits and public speaking to help companies better understand how to talk to potential clients and relate to their employees. We interviewed industry experts on koi health and water quality management to help contractors who came from landscaping into the pond world understand how things work. We have had experts on digital marketing, personal branding and customer relations help our listeners improve their skill sets in those topics. Sharing all this incredibly valuable knowledge has helped us build our personal brand and adds value to our company.

Often by the time you hear about a

trend, you are already behind the curve. But in podcasting, it is not too late. Chris Williamson, the host of Modern Wisdom, says podcasting isn't hard; you just have to be consistent. Many podcasters quit after just three episodes, and 90% quit after 10 episodes. If you can make it past 21 episodes, you are already in the top 1% and have a great chance of getting somewhere.

The most important thing is just to do it. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. Help your business get to a higher level. Just because your friends and family are tired of hearing you talk about ponds doesn't mean other people aren't interested in what you have to say. You just need to get started saying it! ☞

Eric Triplett is the owner and operator of The Pond Digger Waterscape Design & Construction Company, and the creator of Helix Life Support Pond Filtration Systems. Triplett has dedicated his life to ponds and shares his experience, both successes and failures, to help professionals and DIYers create beautiful, low maintenance water features.

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Trade News



New Atlantic-Oase Fountain Basins

Atlantic-Oase has added two new fountain basins, each with enhanced strength and stability, perfect for tall, narrow and heavy decorative fountain pieces. With freestanding reservoirs that house and protect pump and plumbing, the new square basins feature more internal support cones to better stabilize and transfer weight from the platform to the ground. They maintain the topside channels of previous models for dry adjustment and protected plumbing, but now accommodate up to 1-1/2" PVC pipe and fittings for enhanced flow. A reinforced pump access cover and lower profile rim allow for easier concealment, and new plumbing kits make setup even easier.

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Trade News

United Kingdom Prepares for 2024 IWGS Symposium

The dates for the 2024 International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society (IWGS) Symposium are as follows: Main Symposium Tuesday, July 16th – Saturday, July 20, 2024; Optional Pre-Symposium Day Tuesday, July 16, 2024; and optional Post-Symposium Day Saturday, July 20, 2024.



The 2024 IWGS Symposium will be based in the town of Reading, England, which is about 35 miles west of London, and has good transport connections to London and Heathrow Airport (LHR). The main symposium will include visits to the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and RHS Wisley garden, plus a trip to Bennetts Water Gardens in Dorset. There will be an education day on Friday, July 19.

The pre-symposium day is a trip from Reading to gardens in the Cotswolds. There will be limited spaces on this day.

The post-symposium day will visit two water plant growers near London, plus the gardens at Wakehurst. Drop-off points at the end of this day will suit those needing to travel on to airports (Gatwick (LGW) & Heathrow (LHR)), or London hotels, or returning to Reading. There will be limited spaces on this day.

The Symposium location is conveniently located for those who might add on a holiday in the United Kingdom or mainland Europe (e.g. Paris Olympics), before or afterward. Keep an eye on <https://iwgs.org/symposium/> for updated information.



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2024 IWGS SYMPOSIUM

READING, UK JULY 16 - 20, 2024

Including visits to the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, RHS Wisley Garden and a trip to Bennetts Water Gardens in Dorset.

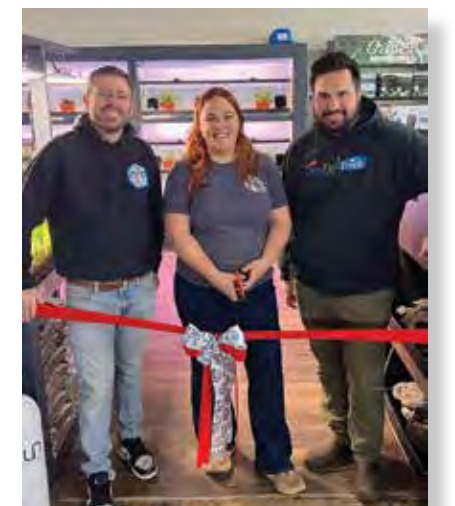
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Fitz's Fish Ponds Dives into a New Aquatic Frontier with the Grand Opening of FFP Aquariums & Aquascaping Store

Fitz's Fish Ponds, a prominent player in the pond industry, celebrated the grand opening of its dedicated Aquariums & Aquascaping store within the flagship Green Brook retail pond store on Jan. 20 and 21, 2024. The expansion into planted aquariums promises customers an unparalleled experience.

The event featured expert insights, giveaways and demonstrations, with special guest John from Oase providing expert guidance on filtration solutions. The store proudly showcased products from top brands, offering attendees the chance to win prizes, including an Oase filter, Beta fish, plants, schools of fish and a \$200 FFP Aquariums & Aquascaping gift card. CEO Brian Fitzsimmons expressed excitement about the store's launch, highlighting the teamwork of Aquariums Manager Jenn Bujalski and Store Manager Ryan Cardillo. The store is set to become a haven for planted aquarium enthusiasts, offering a comprehensive range of products and a knowledgeable team that aims to create a gathering place for all planted aquarium hobbyists. For inquiries, contact 908-420-9908 ext. 4 or email jennifer@fitzfishponds.com.





The St. Louis Water Garden Society Prepares for its 24th Annual Pond Tour

The St. Louis Water Garden Society (SLWGS) is celebrating 34 years of shared learning and advocacy for ponds, fish and gardens. This year marks the Society's 24th annual water garden and pond tour, known as "Pond-O-Rama," a top attraction and fundraiser for the organization.

The two-day event will be held on Saturday, June 22 and Sunday, June 23 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and feature private water gardens opened to the public for exploration and appreciation. The self-guided tour includes a daily itinerary organized by location throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area.



Pond Tour hosts are members of the Water Garden Society and, together with designers, architects and contractors, work all year to build or enhance their gardens and water features. This year will include many new ponds and waterfalls, along with perennial favorites that feature everything from bubbling rocks to large ponds and the beautiful landscaping with perennials, annuals and shrubs.

Hosts love to share their inspiration and experience creating their water feature, regardless of size, with visitors to their gardens each year. Some of the gardens on the tour have been featured in local publications like St. Louis Homes and Lifestyles Magazine, but Pond-O-Rama offers a chance to engage with the hosts, many of whom are master gardeners, about their gardens.

Proceeds from the annual Pond Tour enable the St. Louis Water Garden Society to continue their civic project planting and maintaining the reflecting ponds at the Jewel Box. For 34 years, the Society members have worked in the lily ponds each Saturday from May to October to keep them healthy and looking beautiful for the millions visiting our beloved Forest Park each year.

Pond-O-Rama tickets are just \$20 per person (18 and older, group discount available) and include the tour ticket booklet with pictures, tour map, descriptions and more for both days of the pond tour. Tickets will be available for purchase online at <https://slwgs.org> and in store at local retail shops and garden centers throughout the metropolitan area beginning May 1. Society members receive a complimentary ticket as part of their membership dues.

For more information or to become a member of the St. Louis Water Garden Society, please visit <https://slwgs.org>.



EasyPro Launches Employee Stock Ownership Plan

EasyPro Pond Products is announcing that it is now the industry's first 100% employee-owned company! Through the creation of an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP), Dave and Chris Ouwinga have sold the company to their EasyPro employees. Dave will continue to be closely involved in the operations of EasyPro as the chairman of the Board of Directors. This transfer of ownership will allow EasyPro's outstanding employees to benefit from their work in a unique way while allowing Dave more time with his family. This also ensures that EasyPro Pond Products will continue on with the same values and focus that it was founded on decades ago.

"I have been blessed far beyond my wildest dreams from this business, this industry and the many, many friendships I have made since starting EasyPro," Dave said. "Turning it over to my employees to continue on was the obvious choice since they are the ones who helped me build the company and know it inside and out already."



"This allows me to stay in the business, albeit behind the scenes more, to ensure a long and smooth transition," he continued. "Our focus will continue to be Innovation, Quality and Experience as we move forward! To the thousands of customers that have helped build the EasyPro brand, thank you! We could not have done it without you."

A new face is now at the helm. Paul Cole has begun his new position as president and CEO of EasyPro Pond Products. Cole comes to EasyPro with extensive knowledge and experience in the pond industry, manufacturing and leadership.

"When I was searching for the best person to fill this position, there was only one person that I would trust with the future of EasyPro and its employees," Dave said. "Paul is not only a great friend but also a great human being. EasyPro, its staff and customers are in great hands with Paul."



Ecological Laboratories Lends Support to European Partner

Ecological Laboratories, a leader in the koi pond and water gardening industry, has cultivated a robust network of partnerships that have been pivotal in establishing their Microbe-Lift Pond Brand as a market frontrunner. This brand, renowned for its efficacy and trustworthiness, enjoys widespread acclaim not only in North America but also across Europe, a testament to the strength of its collaboration with SIBO Fluidra, a key partner in the region.

In a significant milestone for both organizations, Ecological Laboratories was honored to participate in the 30th anniversary celebration of SIBO Fluidra and the inauguration of their new cutting-edge Pro Center in Doornhoek, Netherlands, in November 2023. This grand event, attended by more than 300 dealers representing a multitude of countries, was a vibrant testament to the global reach of this partnership.



Ecological Laboratories contributed significantly by conducting several insightful training sessions for key customers, fostering a rich exchange of knowledge and expertise. The event culminated in a unique afterparty and both celebrated past achievements and also set the stage for an even more fruitful collaboration in 2024 and beyond.

Las Vegas Sets the Stage for 2024 All-American Koi Show

W. Lim Corporation is proud to announce that the All-American Koi show is now officially sanctioned by Shinkokai Japan! Along with the sanctioning of the koi show as Shinkokai, Hector and Shawn from Mystic Koi have invited and secured some of the top Japanese koi breeders to come and judge the entries for the All-American Koi Show 2024 and beyond.



This prestigious title and amazing judge selection sets this show to a higher level of excellence for its koi competition standards. Shinkokai has also added a Presidential trophy and scroll award for the All American Grand Champion. This is the first of its kind in the USA. Come out to Vegas and enjoy the best Japanese koi in America on exhibition, and meet and greet with some of the top breeders in Japan who will be bringing their "dream pond koi". These are top-quality koi that are not normally available to the general public.

You can also expect the industry's koi hobby manufacturers of food and pond equipment, the best koi dealers and an opportunity to experience the awards ceremony banquet, where you will see hobbyists and professionals receive their artisan-made bronze trophies for all major koi categories. Visit our website at www.allamericankoishow.com.



Goodness Gracious Great Ball of Water! Blue Thumb's Newest Fountain is a Hit!

Blue Thumb's Crystal Sphere forms a perpetually flowing ball of water with their newest fountain kit. Who doesn't like a little magic in their world? These mesmerizing 24-inch orbs are made of sturdy clear acrylic that inverts and reflects the landscape around them. The fountain showcases a substantial acrylic sphere resting on a steel plate, with water soothingly overflowing over its surface. At night, the included LED lights infuse the fountain with a spectrum of colors, enhancing the visual spectacle. This package comes complete with polished pebbles, a magnetic drive pump, and all required plumbing to ensure a simple setup.

Blue Thumb
888/619-3474
www.shopbluethumb.com/crystal-sphere-fountain-kit/



EasyPro's 4-Watt LED Rock Light

This realistic rock cover is molded from actual rock for a natural look that blends into the landscape of ponds, waterfalls and gardens. Rock lights feature a stainless steel housing for long life and are safe for chlorine and salt water. Super bright, warm white lights are fully submersible and may be used in or out of the water. Lights come with a three-year warranty.

To request your full color catalog or for more information on EasyPro products, call 800-448-3873 or visit easypro.com.

Celebrating Sean Frost, the Newly Crowned Aquascape Artist of the Year

Sean received the highest accolades from his peers on Dec. 15, 2023, when a group of nine highly talented Certified Aquascape Contractors from around the world gathered to anxiously await the naming of the coveted Artist of the Year award. Each of the nine hopefuls had been voted as a regional



winner by their peers. They gathered at Aquascape to present and explain their work to the existing Artists of the Year and select employees of Aquascape, who then voted on a final winner.

“And this year’s winner,” announced Brian Helfrich, vice president of construction at Aquascape, “is Sean Frost of Nature Scapes!” Sean is the 13th artist to receive the

distinguished award from Aquascape. He joins a select group of pond builders that excel in crafting natural works of watery art.

When it comes to finding inspiration, Sean only needs to step outside of his cabin for an inspiring view of the Wild Meadow Brook that wraps around his home. Living in the foothills of New Hampshire’s White Mountains provides the never-ending beauty of waterfalls and streams to explore and replicate.

Of all of Sean’s creations over the years, his favorite water feature project is located at Blue Water Manor in Bolting Landing, New York. It was a collaborative project with fellow contractors Fred Pape, April Dugan, John Adams and Matt Landry.

Sean continues to build, consult and mentor within the water feature industry. He enjoys being inspired by his peers and, in turn, helping those who are starting out.



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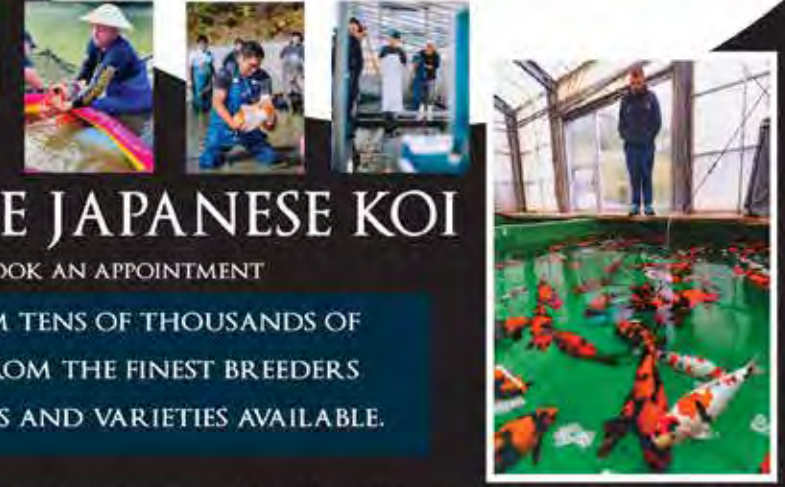


The Lady Approves

Photo courtesy of Gerard Touhey



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