

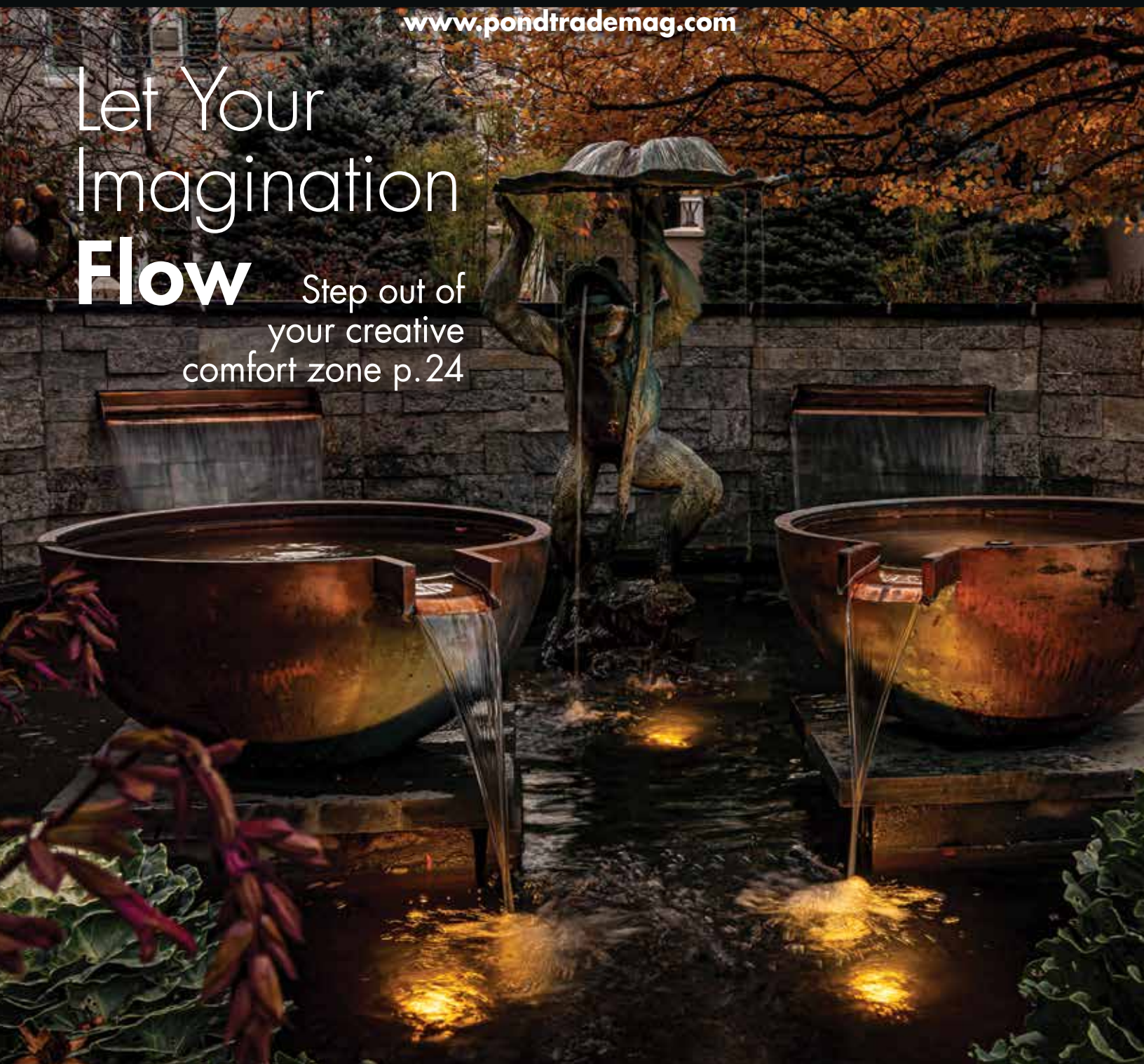
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Let Your
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Flow Step out of
your creative
comfort zone p.24





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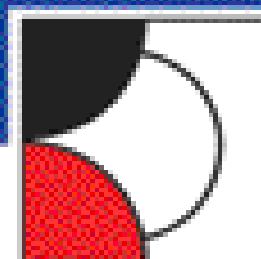


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FEATURES

8 The Little Builder That Could POND CONSTRUCTION

When **Roger & Melody Sears** were approached about constructing a large waterfall and bog filtering system for a 1-acre earth-bottom pond, their small business skills were put to the test. In the end, they relied on a network of strong, reciprocal, professional relationships to get the job done.

16 Preparing for a Cold Snap

It might not feel that way right now, but winter is on its way. In colder climates, pond owners have to explore their options for keeping oxygen levels high, the aquatic plants thriving and their fish happy. **Harrison Hugo** offers his expertise with a discussion of aerators vs. de-icers.

21 Amplify Your Brand

Small business owners wear many hats, and they often try to do it all. That can be very counter-productive, according to **Laura Reale**. Success is often measured by both what you do and whom you know — learn how to leverage your professional network to grow your business in new ways.

24 Let Your Imagination Flow COVER STORY

Refining and perfecting your standard business practices and workmanship is always important, but if you ask **Heath Webb**, it doesn't stop there. In the ever-changing market for contemporary features, it's important to step out of your creative comfort zone if you want to learn how to produce any concept that is presented by a client.

34 Greybeard Hacks for Pond Builders

Demi Fortuna recalls the mid '80s when pond builders had far fewer off-the-shelf solutions for common applications. Builders had to build and rebuild what they needed to get the job done — often many times before they got it right! Check out these solutions that have stood the test of time.



41 Like Father, Like Son

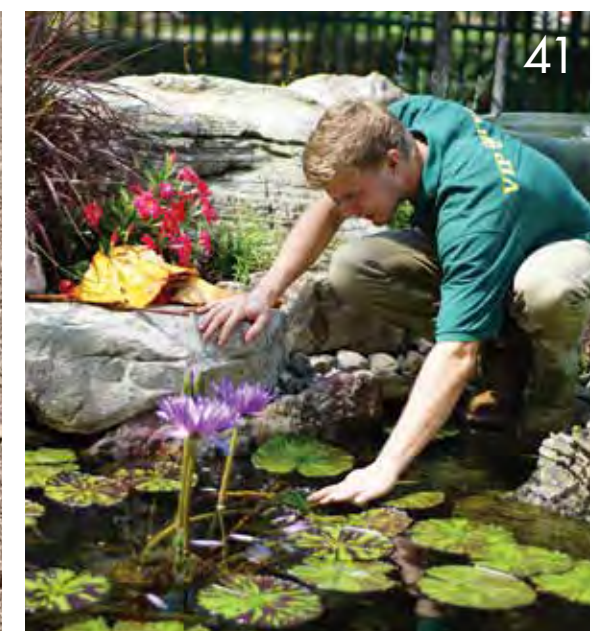
While **Bradley Blocksom** was growing up, he had the privilege and pleasure of working alongside his dad at Pondscapes of Charlotte to learn the ways of the water-feature business. Today, he is a full-time employee. The story of how his relationship with his father evolved over time is an inspiring one, especially if you work for a family business.

47 Arctic Aquatics LANGUAGE OF KOI

As far as koi are concerned, winterizing a pond is more than just keeping the water aerated. **Carolyn Weise** offers a more comprehensive checklist for pond owners in cooler climates to reference in keeping their koi thriving and happy when outdoor temperatures take a dive.

53 Repeat Business

Doesn't everyone love a repeat customer? **Kent Wallace** goes for round two with a customer whose formal pond was featured in past issues of this magazine. The new, 10,000-gallon pond is a garden setting with a turtle habitat.



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Upcoming Events

2023

August 25 - September 4
Water Gardens at MN State Fair
 Minnesota Water Garden Society (MWGS)
 Minnesota State Fair
 Falcon Heights, Minnesota
 www.MWGS.org

September 22 - 24
21st Annual Northern Midwest ZNA Koi Show and Pond Expo
 Timberwinds Nursery
 Ellisville, Missouri
 www.nmzna.net
 www.gatewaykoiandpondclub.org

October 18 - 20
Hardscape North America
 Kentucky Exposition Center
 Louisville, Kentucky
 www.hardscapena.com

October 19
Your Pond Farm Trade Show
 Trade Show at the Farm
 Barto, Pennsylvania
 www.yourpondfarm.com

October 25 - 27
Your Pond Farm Trade Show
 Atlantic-OASE Professional Conference
 Cleveland, Ohio
 www.atlantic-oase.com/conference

November 13 - 15
International POOL | SPA | PATIO Expo
 Las Vegas Convention Center
 Las Vegas, Nevada

2024

February 28 - March 1
Water Garden Expo
 Firelake Grand Casino
 Shawnee, Oklahoma
 www.wgexpo.com

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Publisher's Perspective

Pumpkin Spice

When these words are spoken too soon, they are actually cringeworthy! As I write this column, we are still in the throws of summer, and it's not something I want to think about. In the midwest, summer is a treasure, and we live life to the fullest in the summer!



But by the time you read this, things will have changed. Fall is a lovely time of year. The weather is great, all the colors coming out, and pond building is still in full swing — with a bonus of cooler temperatures!

Fall also signals a slowdown ahead, where builders can look forward to a slower pace and time to do some organizing and planning for the coming year.

With all this in mind, we have put together some some useful, timely fall/winter articles for your reading pleasure and professional enrichment. If you live in colder climates, pond winterization is probably already on your mind. Thankfully, Harrison Hugo is here with a discussion of aerators and de-icers ("Preparing for a Cold Snap," pg. 16) that clearly defines the function and features of each type of system. We also have a winterization checklist for koi keepers in Carolyn Weise's Language of Koi installment ("Arctic Aquatics," pg. 47) that features a rundown of everything you need to know about wintry water conditions.

We're also happy Demi Fortuna is back with a profile on low-tech pond hacks that every pond builder should read and digest ("Greybeard Hacks for Pond Builders," pg. 34). Demi included helpful sketches and photos of concepts that could save you lots of time and money.

Finally, in line with annual tradition, the arrival of fall also means the opening of the Water Artisans of the Year competition. This contest gets more and more competitive each year, so go ahead and round up the photos of your best work from this pond season for submission. Enter now through Nov. 30. See more details on pg. 39.

Happy PONDering!

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| Pond Construction |

by Roger & Melody Sears,
Songbird Ponds

The call came in from a current customer, Mike Hartman, the owner of H & H Excavating. A friend of his wanted a 1-acre earth-bottom pond with a big waterfall and a bog filtering system. Mike had told his friend that H & H could dig the pond, but they would need an actual pond builder for the waterfall and bog system.

This would be the biggest project we had ever tackled. My mind began to race with all the logistics involved. Songbird Ponds is small — only my wife and business partner Melody, two helpers at most, and yours truly. I have two pickup trucks, a flatbed trailer and a dump trailer. My only piece of serious equipment is a mini excavator with a 24-inch bucket named Tigger the Digger.

Was I going to drown in my own pond project, or had I built the relationships necessary to successfully complete this project to a professional standard? We took a deep breath and dove in.

The two 5-Hp pumps (left) are in place on their stone pads. The pond is beginning to fill with ground water up to the orange line. We used Tigger (below) to spread the gravel in the smaller bog. For the larger bog, we used a track loader.

The Little Builder That Could

Larger-than-life project puts small contractor to the test





The matrix layout used in each bog (left) has a settlement chamber and water channels under the gravel layer. It felt like I walked several miles each day up and down this hill (right) during waterfall construction.



Program Management

At the initial meeting, I was shown the proposed plan for the scope and dimensions — a simple, 1-acre pond 15 feet deep and a hill created with the soil from the pond with an expected elevation of 18 feet. My part would be to create a bog filtering system on top of the newly built hill and rock in an 80-foot stream and an 18-foot waterfall flowing back into the pond. All the rocks would come from the excavated pond. When I expressed my first concern about lacking the necessary equipment for the project, Mike with H & H assured me that he could provide the equipment and the operators when I needed them.

As I began to put together the estimate for this project, I calmed my anxiety by reminding myself that the steps for building this water feature were the same as always — only the scale had changed. Because of that, my first call was to Joel Kammeraad, the owner of Complete Aquatics in Plain City, Ohio, my former employer. Joel and Complete Aquatics have a lot of experience with projects of this size, and I needed his technical support. I explained the project, and Joel excitedly began to calculate that we would need a 95-by-95-foot bog to filter a

1-acre pond. Joel knew where to source the 100-by-100-foot liner and the two 5-Horsepower pumps mounted on sleds with weights to be sunk to the bottom of the pond. These pumps would move 30,000 gallons per hour through a 6-inch line to create an impressive — some would say breathtaking — waterfall!

Growing Pains

My first trip to the site was a real eye opener and also a heartstopper! The pond excavation was almost completed, and there was a massive hill of dirt beside the pond that was about 40 feet tall, with a level area on top only about 20 feet wide. It turned out that the area meant to accept all the extra dirt had been deemed wetlands, and the back side was the neighbor's property. There was not enough room for one 95-by-95-foot bog, and the waterfall just grew from about 18 feet to 35 feet in height!

The total size of the bog could not be changed, so the equipment operators and I put our heads together and came up with a solution. We could build two smaller bogs that would make up one large bog. They were able to add soil to the back side of the larger area for a 95-by-60-foot bog on that plateau,

and the other one would be 95 by 35 feet. This plan also included a 200-foot stream to join the large bog with the top of the waterfall — quite a difference from the original proposal.

Would I still be able to get the desired water flow down the waterfall? I would hate to go through all this work for a trickle. A third pump might be needed. On the plus side, we had a huge pile of rocks of all sizes for us to use neatly stacked on a pile the size of a house. We would use every one of them!

When looking at the site in front of me, I once again had to remind myself, “This is still a simple waterfall, stream and bog system. I have built these many times, and the process will be the same. It will just take a little longer and some extra manpower.”

Building Begins

My worker, Roy, and I assembled all the matrix units for the bogs and then moved to install the pumps and aeration systems first before the water got too deep in the pond. Installing the pumps was easy. Roy and I made gravel platforms on the pond bottom, set the pump units and ran the cords already attached up to the pond edge then attached them to our 6-inch pipe

When looking at the site in front of me, I once again had to remind myself, “This is still a simple waterfall, stream and bog system. I have built these many times, and the process will be the same. It will just take a little longer and some extra manpower.”

to the bogs.

The aeration system was installed at this time as well. I also built a pipe drain system so I could drain the pipes to the bogs in case the waterfall was shut down. I wanted to be able to keep water in the bogs themselves so the plants would survive. Since we had two bogs, I decided to make smaller settlement chambers across the bottom of each bog. That allowed for water to travel the entire bottom before

entering the gravel area.

Next, we began the fun part — building the waterfall. I asked Mike for a large excavator and an operator to move the boulders. With Roy in Tigger bringing the boulders to Gage in the large excavator, I stationed myself in the waterfall, and we set each boulder into its permanent home. We had to start with the equipment at the bottom and later move it to the top. The liner had to be kept rolled up and unrolled as we moved along so the



The 200-foot stream led from the bog back to the main waterfall.

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The main waterfall — what a great feeling to see this beast come to life. The roar can be heard clear across the pond!



equipment wouldn't be on it. Lots of underlayment was used both under and on top of the liner. Boulders were locked in with each other and back filled with round gravel before finally getting foamed in.

When we reached the top of the waterfall, it was time to build the bogs. I knew that this portion of the build was going to require more labor than I currently had on payroll. I contacted several landscapers and asked for help for a few days. Thankfully this was in February, and most were not busy and happy to lend a hand or send a helper who wanted some hours.

Merely unfolding and spreading those enormous liners was certainly more than a two-person job. Laying in the underlayment and liner was also a challenge because of the wind, which would pick us up and throw us around! Finally, we brought in the gravel. I was able to use a track loader to actually spread out the gravel once we had enough in to protect the liner. Ultimately, we used 160 tons of gravel in the bogs and another 20 tons building the waterfalls and streams.

The last phase was to build the stream over to the big bog and install our pipe along a narrow neck of hill, under the top of the waterfall and along the stream

edge. The stream was a total of about 200 feet long and about 6 to 8 feet wide, with four smaller waterfalls on top of liner overlaps so no sealant was needed.

When we finally turned on the pumps and started the waterfalls, we were very happy with the result. Using a 6-inch line for the pipe was a big help in maintaining healthy water flow even with the additional height of the waterfall and



This structure houses the check valves and aeration system. The smaller pipes and ball valves allow for drainage of the pipes when it's time to winterize the system. The pump power cables will be connected to the power source in here as well.

the additional length of the stream. I did choose to add a third pump — an Atlantic Tidalwave A-32 — through a 3-inch line for an additional 10,000 gallons per hour that entered the waterfall about one-third of the way down, at a point where the waterfall widened. We believe the total flow is

When we reached the top of the waterfall, it was time to build the bogs. I knew that this portion of the build was going to require more labor than I currently had on payroll.



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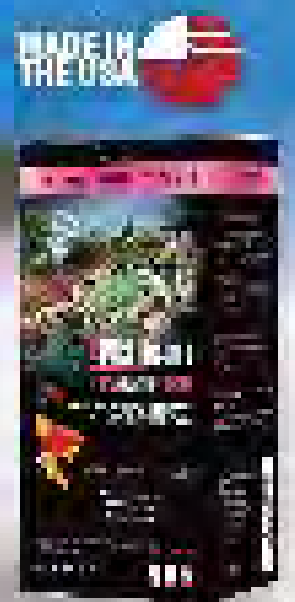
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When we planted marginal plants in the bogs, we put the floating hyacinths in anchored hoops so they wouldn't be washed over the falls.

about 50,000 gallons per hour when all three pumps are running.
I love to pull out my phone and show videos of this feature, even though I know this is nothing that hasn't been done before and by better pond builders than I. But for Songbird Ponds, this was Niagara Falls!

Making the Dream Work

I wanted to express my sincerest and heartfelt appreciation to all the people who encouraged, supported and helped us with this build. I also want to thank the people I have had the pleasure to interact with in all my years in this industry. I have attended Aquascape's Pondemonium, Atlantic's Contractor Conference and many other industry seminars. I have gotten to know local landscape contractors at build-a-pond events that I have run, and at trade and garden shows. Through these events, I have made lots of contacts and friendships that have spanned decades. Many are casual, but several have been crucial to me and my business. Their help and

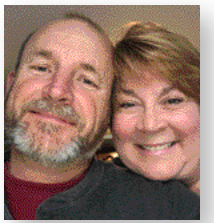
advice have been invaluable, and I try my best to reciprocate whenever the opportunity arises.
My role at Complete Aquatics as sales and tech support was a great steppingstone to having my own business. The things I learned with and from them prepared me to be one of the best in my area when my wife and I began Songbird Ponds. Also, the support from the owners when I asked to leave to begin this venture was beyond expectations. Their response was, "What can we do to help you?"
The strongest professional relationship we have is with Sightscapes, our local pond store and product distributor here in York, Pennsylvania. The owner, Kyle Zirkle, has been like a third partner, always able to get what we need. He has our back with new leads and customer support for all our pond customers.
The importance of strong, reciprocal professional relationships is of primary importance to a small business, especially when it comes to extending your reach. My initial trepidation about the

scale of this project was overcome as I thought through the necessary process and steps and whom I could reach out to for assistance. My friends did not let me down and supported me with products, technical support, advice, encouragement and even some strong backs and hands. I couldn't have done it alone, but together it turned out spectacular! ☘

About the Author

Roger and Melody Sears

are the owners of Songbird Ponds in Hanover, Pennsylvania. Roger has worked in the pond industry for more than 35 years, with different jobs ranging from digging and designing the hole to selling what actually goes in the hole. Thankfully, doing all three is what he loves best. Melody is in charge of everything else. (Everything — including Roger!)



Combining a pond de-icer and aeration unit will ensure that a hole is kept open in the ice, water circulates properly, and dissolved oxygen levels remain high.



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Preparing for a **Cold Snap**

Aeration vs. pond heaters for winterization

by Harrison Hugo,
Airmax

There are multiple factors that must be considered when designing any pond. When planning a pond in a cold weather climate, the proper care of fish during the winter months should play a vital role in the design of a pond.

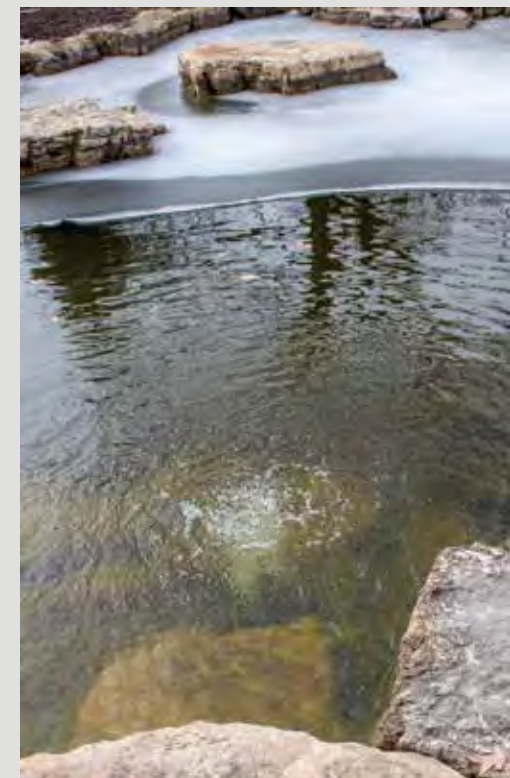
Beyond typical design features like shape and depth, a decision must be made as to how to handle any ice that forms on the surface of the pond. When left unchecked, ice can completely cover the surface of the pond, allowing toxic gases to accumulate in the water and eventually leading to fish illness and even death.

There are two common approaches to dealing with ice when there are fish wintering in the pond — installing a pond heater and installing an aeration system. While either system can help fish survive through the winter, aeration offers distinct advantages over heaters that should make it the choice for every pond and every client.

What's the Difference?

Pond heaters are systems designed to float at the surface of a pond and keep a hole open in the ice throughout the winter months. This small hole is intended to allow gas exchange in the pond, allowing toxic gases that can build up under the ice to vent

out of the pond. This venting will lessen the chances of a fish kill over the winter months. Pond heaters come in a variety of sizes and should be selected according to the pond



Aeration systems ensure oxygen levels stay high every hour of every season, including winter.

size and the climate. These are intended to keep a small section of a pond clear of ice — not to heat the entire pond.

In contrast, aeration systems are designed to circulate the water body by placing diffus-

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ers at the bottom of the pond and using an external compressor to pass air through the diffusers, lifting the water and adding oxygen to the water body. Aeration systems will not keep a pond clear of ice, but when properly installed, they will keep a hole open in the surface of the ice, allowing for gas exchange and preventing gases from building up in the water body. They will also maintain a higher oxygen level in the pond, further contributing to fish health and well-being throughout the winter.

How Do I Choose?

The primary factors that should be considered when selecting a system for your pond are the costs associated with the system, the health and well-being of the fish and the additional benefits to the pond that the system can offer.

Pond heaters offer a relatively simple and usually inexpensive design but can be very costly to operate and do not provide much additional benefit to the pond beyond maintaining a hole in the ice. A standard-size pond heater is 1250 watts. Smaller and larger units are available, but to properly keep a hole open in an average size pond, a 1250-watt heater is commonly recommended. The operating cost of a 1250-watt heater can easily run over \$100 a month in the colder months when operating 24 hours a day. Even though the units are relatively inexpensive, they can become very cost prohibitive to run for an entire winter.

This is in stark contrast when compared to aeration systems. Aeration systems will have a similar initial purchase price but significantly lower operating costs. Aeration systems designed for some of the largest water gardens will only have operating costs of \$2 to \$3 per month. This simple fact alone makes aeration a much smarter choice for any pond build; however, in addition, aeration also offers other benefits above and beyond what is offered by a pond heater.

Water garden aeration systems can be utilized for more than keeping

The primary factors that should be considered when selecting a system for your pond are the costs associated with the system, the health and well-being of the fish and the additional benefits to the pond that the system can offer.

a hole open in the ice in the winter. It is highly recommended to keep an aeration system installed and operating throughout the year, as it will offer benefits to the fish and the overall pond ecosystem. Aeration systems increase the oxygen levels in a pond while circulating the entire water body. They offer much more aeration than a simple pump and waterfall circulation system. Creating an oxygen-rich environment will lead to better overall fish health and help strengthen a fish's immune system, allowing the fish to better fight off diseases that can come from an improperly maintained ecosystem. The higher oxygen levels will also lead to increased beneficial bacteria growth in the pond and help the overall effectiveness of any bacteria treatments being added to a pond. The increase in

the effectiveness of beneficial bacteria will lead to reduced nutrient levels in the pond which will help limit algae growth.

There are multiple factors that must be considered when designing any pond. Winterization of the pond is one of the factors that can play a vital role in the health of the fish and the overall well-being of the pond. While pond heaters may be inexpensive to purchase and easy to install, their operating costs far exceed the operating cost of a pond aeration system. They also offer no additional benefit to a pond beyond maintaining a hole in the ice. Aeration systems will not only keep a hole open in the ice in the winter, but they will increase the oxygen level of the pond and provide year-round benefits, creating healthier fish and a better pond ecosystem. *CS*

About the Author

Harrison Hugo is the technical support manager at Airmax. Before moving into this role, he gained experience working in sales and as a certified pond treatment applicator. In his current role, Harrison is troubleshooting products and training new technicians on everything pond related, from water garden setups to laying out and installing pond and lake aeration systems.



If your pond becomes covered with ice, there is no way for the gases to escape or for fresh air to reach the water. Oxygen levels decline, and toxic gases build up in a potentially deadly combination for fish and plants. Bottom-diffused aeration and de-icers help maintain an opening in the ice to increase water movement and oxygen saturation.

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by **Laura Reale**,
Pondtrent

In today's competitive business landscape, finding new avenues to grow your pond business is crucial for sustained success. While strategies like Google Ads and email marketing are the top two ways we got business last year, networking remains a powerful tool for generating leads and building lasting relationships. In this article, we will explore networking and how networking landed our pond company, AquaReale, over \$250,000 worth of business.

Referrals: Whom Do You Know?

When it comes to expanding your pond business, word-of-mouth recommendations can be a game-changer. By develop-

ing strong relationships with professionals in related industries, such as roofers, pool service providers, tree service experts and landscapers, you can tap into their networks and receive valuable referrals. These individuals often encounter homeowners seeking pond services and can direct them your way.

I find local referrals that make sense for us, like tree people and landscapers. For example, the tree company I found carries our rack cards with them. We have a card that includes both companies' information and links our companies, allowing them to leverage their reputation and connection with their clients to help build trust in our company.

Landscapers are natural allies for pond businesses. To find them, consider attending industry events, joining local associa-

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tions or participating in trade shows where landscapers gather. Engage in conversations and establish connections with them. Once you've established contact, ensure you have a concise and compelling pitch ready, highlighting the benefits of adding a pond to their landscaping projects. Offering collaborations or incentives can also make your proposal more enticing. We also reach out to individual landscapers through email marketing and phone calls and have for years.

We did our first big landscaper push about six years ago. I purchased a mailing list of landscapers from a list supplier. I put in exactly what I was looking for — landscape companies that brought in at least \$500,000 in the right areas. I then created a "Dream Book" based on our photos, wrote a letter and snail mailed them to about 100 landscapers. We heard back from two, which may seem disappointing at first, but it really was not. One is all you need. One of those landscapers still provides us with leads and work.

We did something similar this winter. Our office manager created a list of 50 local landscape companies. We wrote emails and sent them out individually and then called and followed up with each company. Once again, we had just one very interested party. And once again, that was all we needed! This company had an in-house pond person who had recently left their position, and we were in the right place at the right time. AquaReale just signed a contract two weeks ago to work with the landscape company on a large pond renovation at a major pharmaceutical company. The contract is worth \$37,000 — well worth all those emails and phone calls!

Specialized Audiences

Landscape architects and designers are key decision makers who can incorporate ponds into their projects. To reach them, explore opportunities through Chambers of Commerce

and Business Networking International (BNI) groups, where these professionals often engage with potential partners. Participating in industry events or hosting informational sessions can also help you establish yourself as an expert in pond construction and maintenance. Also, do what we did and do your own research.



Networking within specialized communities can significantly benefit your pond business. Engaging with garden clubs, koi clubs and garden centers allows you to connect with individuals who are passionate about outdoor living and landscaping.

Just email, mail and call them! It's amazing what a personal connection can do!

Networking within specialized communities can significantly benefit your pond business. Engaging with garden clubs, koi clubs and garden centers allows you to connect with individuals who are passionate about outdoor living and landscaping. Attend meetings, give presentations or provide educational content to establish yourself as a knowledgeable professional in the field. Building relationships within these communities can lead to referrals and repeat business.

We were the keynote speakers at our local Water Garden Society last year. I first asked if my husband Matt could be their keynote speaker about four years ago. They already had a speaker that year, but the president of the association started getting our weekly pond tip emails. When they were looking for a speaker last year, they turned to us.

There was a couple in attendance whom we connected with. It turns out they were already working with the landscape company that refers us. The landscape company ended up losing the job, but we kept our part, and it was worth over \$50,000. (Note, we would never do this without specific approval from the landscape company.) We offered them a

percentage of the job or a finder's fee, but they just wanted the client to be happy (even without them) and declined. The landscape company appreciated us going back to them with the request to work with the client and still refers us frequently. We just finished up a job for their client this week!

Another year, I purchased a mailing list of garden centers near me. I spent the winter visiting garden centers until I found one with an old decrepit pond. We offered to renovate it for free in exchange for marketing support. We have a big sign by the pond there and at their counter as well and do educational events like fall shutdowns and spring openings there.

Also don't underestimate the power of your local community in generating leads. Consider coaching aspiring pond enthusiasts, sponsoring community events, placing ads in local publications or partnering with organizations like the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts for landscaping projects. These initiatives not only contribute to the community but also showcase your expertise and attract potential customers. We sponsor our local basketball league, our swim club and our local high school. I tend to say yes to community sponsorship requests — you never know where they will lead.

Social Media

In the digital age, leveraging social media platforms is vital for expanding your pond business. Platforms like LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and even TikTok provide opportunities to connect with industry professionals, showcase

your projects and engage with potential clients. Maintain an active presence, share valuable content and engage with followers to establish yourself as a trusted authority in the field. I find companies I want to work with and try to find anyone at their company that is linked to someone in my networking on LinkedIn. Then I ask for introductions.

To maximize your networking efforts, keep these tips in mind. Approach networking without a motive, focusing on building genuine relationships. Adopt a mindset of giving more than you receive, offering recommendations and assistance to others whenever possible. Brand yourself everywhere you go by maintaining a consistent and professional image across all platforms. By incorporating these strategies and maintaining a proactive approach to networking, you can expand your pond business, attract new clients and foster long-term success in the industry.

In a digital world filled with marketing opportunities, it's important not to overlook the power of personal connections. By harnessing the potential of referrals, engaging with professionals in the landscape industry and leveraging local communities, you can unlock new avenues for growth and solidify your position in the pond business market. Embrace networking as an essential tool in your business arsenal and watch your opportunities flourish. ☞

About the Author

Laura Reale is a seasoned marketing professional and co-owner of a successful water features company. After leaving the marketing world for water features, Laura combined her interests to develop successful marketing plans for their company. She turned those efforts into a company called Pondtent (www.mypondtent.com), which provides automated marketing communication solutions to those who want to gain the benefits from these services but don't have time or staffing to support doing it on their own.





This custom feature combines a firepit with a wall spout feature.

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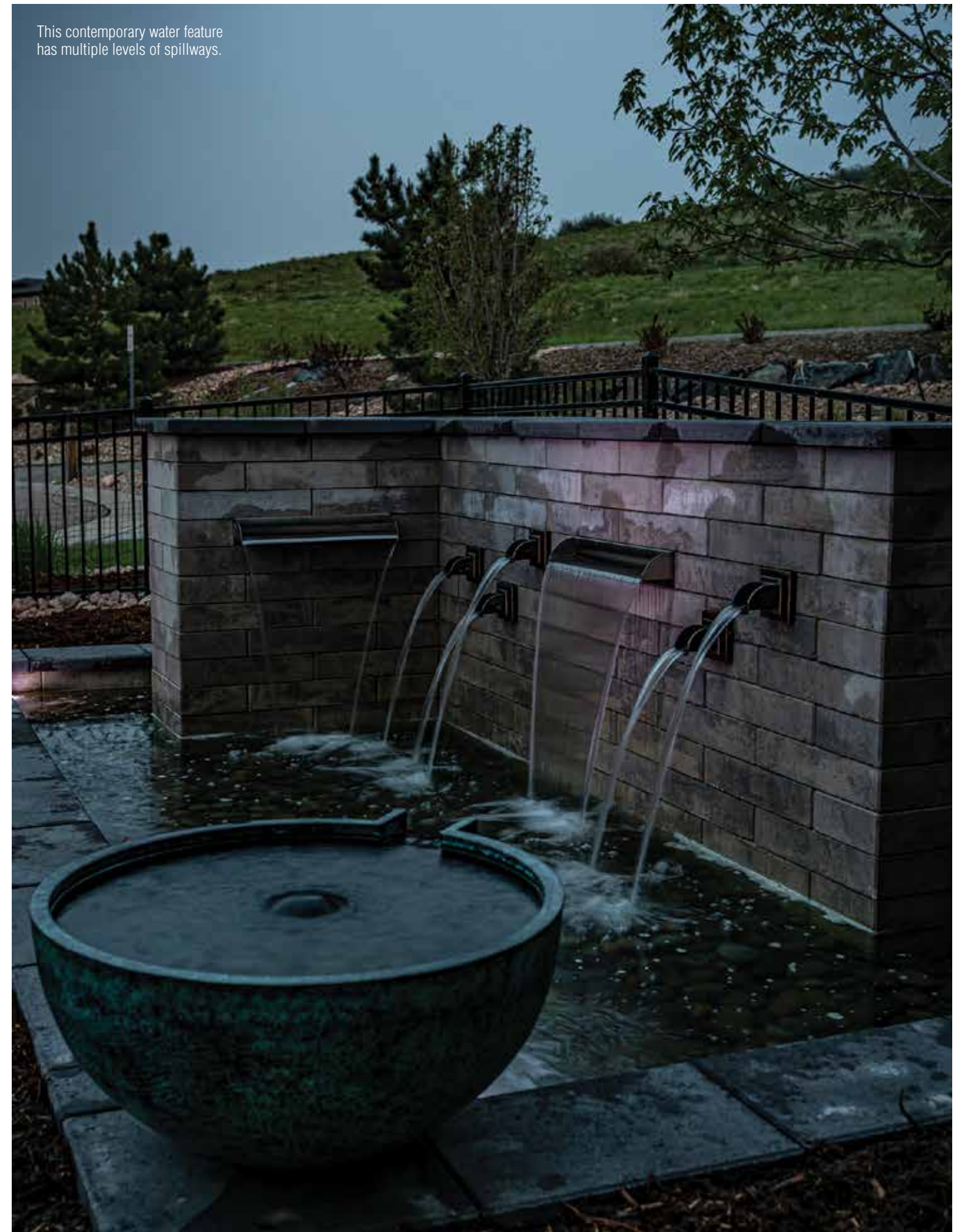
by Heath Webb,

Art of the Yard

Ibegan my water feature career 24 years ago at a greenhouse/nursery selling pond products. From there, my love of everything water grew tremendously from working at a pond supply shop and multiple landscape companies that specialized in water features.

I finally started my own company, Art of the Yard, 13 years ago with Shane Hemphill. I have training in all types of water-feature construction, including pondless, dedicated koi ponds, water gardens and contemporary features. My first love was natural waterfalls and koi ponds, but the ever-changing market for contemporary features has pushed me to step out of my own comfort zone. Now I feel I can produce any concept that is presented by a client.

This contemporary water feature has multiple levels of spillways.



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"Max" the frog loves his new digs.

Cautious Beginnings

During my early years of installations, my style was very cookie cutter, so to speak. Create a set of flat falls in a stair-step pattern. Even the thought of trying to take on some of the projects I have done in recent years would've scared the you-know-what out of me!

As the years went by, I started to get more and more comfortable with my skills and abilities to the point where I was willing to take on the more advanced builds that some of our competitors wouldn't even touch. When asked by a client if we can bring their idea to life, my response was, and always will be, "Of course!" In the back of my head, I might be asking myself what I've gotten myself into, but I know that Shane and I have the confidence in ourselves and our team that we can accomplish anything.

Seek an Expert

You might ask, "Now, how do I gain

the confidence to take on a project that is completely different from anything I've done before?" My answer would be to reach out to others in the industry. Don't be afraid to ask someone for tips and tricks. I think you will find that more often than not, people love to share and feel honored to be asked for help!

If you see someone post an awesome project that you feel is outside your box, send them a message and see if they have time to explain how and why they did something. Learn as much as you can about basic construction. Any trade such as plumbing, framing, electrical, masonry and so on is so valuable in giving you the ability to build something out of this world. I have had many conversations with other contractors in Colorado as well as out-of-state folks who have taught me so much. I also love to teach and share my past experiences, so if you reach out to me or Shane, we will be happy to make time!

Another key aspect in gaining confidence is very simple — Google! I can't stress this enough. I've been doing this a long time and still find myself on YouTube and other sources figuring out how to do things I haven't done myself. The key, though, is to never let a client see you doing it. My guys call me with questions all the time, and I have to remind them that they have the best source for answers in their pocket.

You do have to be careful about where you pull information, and make sure the source you are using has a good reputation. I learn from colleagues' YouTube channels from all over the world when trying to learn new skills.

Expand Your Offerings

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Let's say a potential client visits your website and notices that every project you have done is the same look and style. They now visit a competitor's site that shows diversity and creativity. Which company are they going to choose for their project? Even if you aren't a fan of contemporary water features, dedicated koi ponds or any other specific style, someone out there is looking to pay you to do the install.

The ultimate way to grow your business is to expand the services you offer. I have always been a fan of natural water features and not so much a fan of contemporary, but the ironic part is that we won a Water Artisans of the Year award with a very contemporary install! When you put the maximum effort into any project, the rewards that come from that are huge. I am now a fan of contemporary features

because I can see the beauty in them as well as the financial gain for our company. Never limit yourself because you are nervous. If you believe in quality, creativity and giving it 100%, it's very hard to fail!

The Business Side

We've touched on how expanding your style of building and stepping out of the comfort zone can improve your business, now let's talk about the business side of things.

During our first three years in business, we did everything in our power to take care of day-to-day operations between the two of us. It became very overwhelming answering and returning calls, typing up proposals,

Fire (top) sizzles atop this feature. Copper spillway bowls (bottom) frame a custom art piece.



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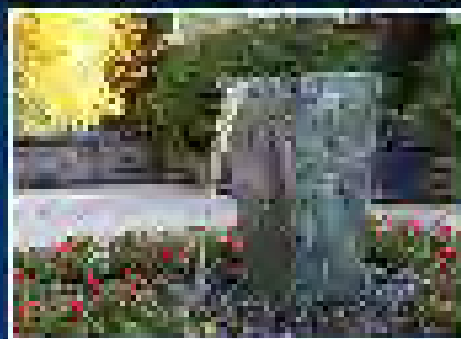
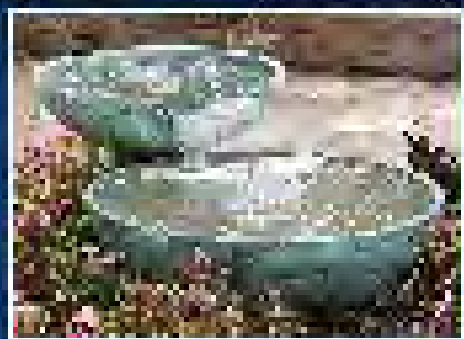
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


A classic-style fountain (above) provides endless beauty. We brought the outdoors in (right) with an interior koi pond.

We learned early on to stick to what we are good at and hire others to take care of the rest.

running payroll, etc.

We learned early on to stick to what we are good at and hire others to take care of the rest. Every time we reach a crossroad where we think it's time to hire someone for a position, we get very nervous, but we have learned over and over to go with your gut. We have rarely lost by doing so. It started with bringing onboard an office manager, then outsourcing payroll and things that we have no business attempting, and finally hiring our own design team.

The stress it removes from Shane and me is huge! We can focus on our sales and installs and not have to worry about the stuff behind the scenes. This all goes back to stepping out of our comfort zone. Limiting the number of hats you wear for your company will allow you to focus on the creative aspect of your business. After all, we all got into water feature installs for our love of water and nature. Try to limit the amount of office time and get out there to do what you love! 



About the Author



Heath Webb has been part owner of Art of the Yard along with Shane Hemphill for the last 13 years. He has been installing water features for 24 years. His love for water developed during his first job at Highlands Garden Center, where he joined their pond department at 15 years old. He would go on to take side jobs installing preformed ponds for customers during the summer, getting his feet wet on the construction side of the water-feature business. He is now the operations manager of four install crews.



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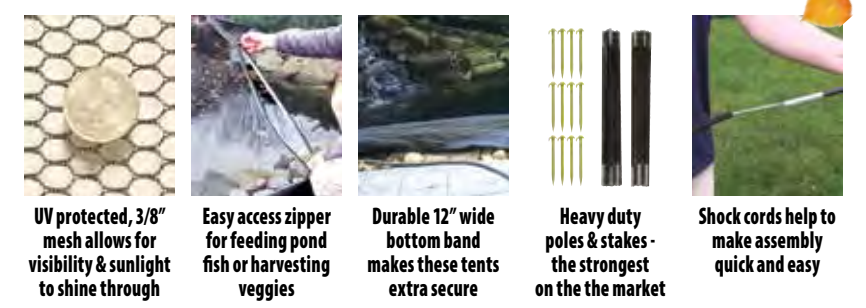
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We made this simple dolly with two solid and two pneumatic wheelbarrow tires. We found rolling the slab with solid tires in front made for easier steering.

Greybeard Hacks

for Pond Builders

Low-tech solutions that stand the test of time

by **Demi Fortuna,**
Atlantic-OASE & August Moon Designs

Back in the mid '80s, pond builders had far fewer off-the-shelf solutions available. We built and rebuilt what we needed to get the job done — often many times before we got it right. Here are some of my more successful Greybeard Hacks.

Bulletproof Bottom Drains

My first ponds were large, occupying the whole of a 50-by-100-foot liner or larger, and

they all lived in a neck of the woods on Long Island where homeowners with 2-acre lots were required to have big drywells. I put two and two together and figured I could use the big drywells to help clean out the ponds, but I couldn't find large enough bottom drains for the 6-inch and 8-inch pipes I was using. Even the hobbyist drains for 4-inch pipe were made for pulling koi wastes into filters, not removing large amounts of debris at high volume.

I had to build my own, and so Bulletproof Bottom Drains were born. Standard schedule 80 PVC flanges mate to either side of the liner

with stainless steel bolts. We make two modifications. First, we grind any sealing ridges flat, so the whole face of the valve becomes a sealing surface. Then, we epoxy the bolt heads into one of the flanges. We install that one in the excavation with the bolts sticking up so when the liner covers them, we can cut a little "X" and work the liner down over the bolt threads.

Next, we cut the drain hole, apply silicone to both the flange under the liner and though the drain hole and the top flange, and bolt them together. Bulletproof — and scalable! I've built these from 2 inches to 12 inches and never had a failure in 30 years. They can even be made to work with an air diffuser, so the rising bubbles create a countercurrent that sweeps wastes into the drain.

Slab Dollys

Our simple Slab Dolly was also born of necessity — specifically, the need to move a triangular slab 5 feet on a side

and 3 inches thick through a 36-inch gate, just two of us, no machine access.

What we had were some scrap 4-by-4s and four wheelbarrows (two

Our simple Slab Dolly was also born of necessity — specifically, the need to move a triangular slab 5 feet on a side and 3 inches thick through a 36-inch gate, just two of us, no machine access.

of which we "borrowed" for the afternoon). One trip to the hardware store for threaded stock, and the task was easy. The hardest part was sliding the 400-pound stone off the truck and onto the dolly. Once upright, it took only one of us to move it from the driveway into the backyard in about a minute and a half. It has become a go-to for flagstone flatwork.

Rock Sled

The Rock Sled was something I had never seen before meeting my buddy

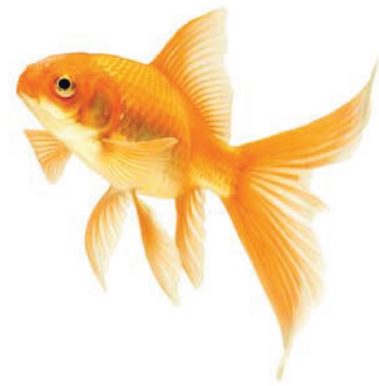
Pete on a pond job. The caretaker of a Gold Coast mansion on Long Island's North Shore, Pete appreciated the history of the mansion and grounds

and used some clever gadgets from a couple of centuries ago when the horse in "horsepower" ate grass, not gas.

The Rock Sled he pulled was small but mighty — 4-by-4s bolted together to make a 2-by-4-foot sled with two iron loops in the front for chains. He drove a little Kubota tractor instead of the Old Grey Mare of song, but it made short work of moving quarter-to-half-ton stones all day long with nary a hay break. Also known as stoneboats, you can find dozens referenced on the web like this style we used.



Made with off-the-shelf slip flanges, the only modification is to grind the ridges down flat so the whole flange seals to the liner. We like 5/8" x 3" stainless bolts epoxied into the bottom flange for 4"-8" drains.



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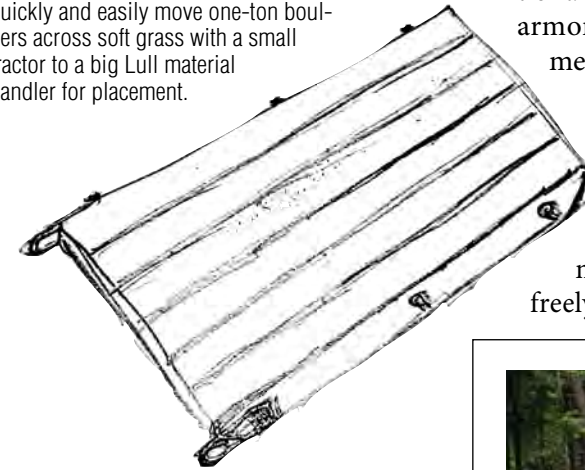
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We used a rock sled (aka stone boat) to quickly and easily move one-ton boulders across soft grass with a small tractor to a big Lull material handler for placement.



Greybeard Gunite

About 15 years ago, we had a storm that loosened a mighty oak branch above the pond in our front yard. After the tenth attempt at patching the hole it left in the EPDM liner, I gave up. It was one of my first ponds, and I had stretched the rubber into it to eliminate wrinkles.

Bad idea. Almost 20 years later, that overstretched, ancient liner just kept ripping past patch after patch when I refilled the pond. It had nothing left. So, one new liner later, I vowed that I would never worry about branches again. I borrowed a tool from the concrete dome people, the Tirolessa Sprayer, which scoops and sprays stucco mixes. I adapted the concrete so I could scoop and spray ¼ inch at a time.

It wouldn't stick to the rubber, so I covered the EPDM with underlayment anchored well at the top to keep the weight of the concrete from pulling it down. After we troweled on four addi-



Using the rock sled to quickly move stones from the pile to the Lull let us concentrate on placement instead of waiting on and cleaning up after the big machine.

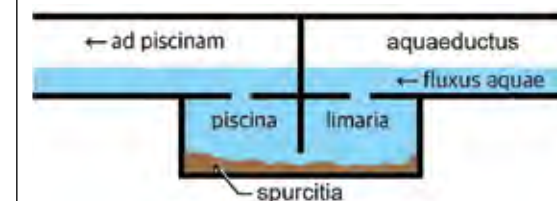
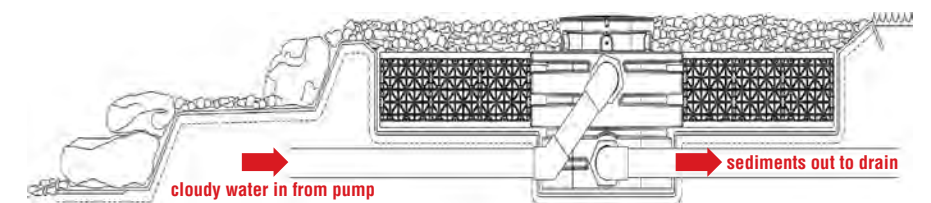
tional ½-inch coats, I had a concrete armor that laughed at sledgehammers. Forget those branches!

We've refined it a bit for zoos and botanical gardens. Now we cover a concrete base with geotextile, then liner, then geotextile, creating a slip membrane so the liner can move freely, even if the base or top layer

crack. Then we top the liner sandwich with a one-to-two mix of Portland and mason sand with an acrylic admixture and chopped fibers ("gorilla hair") to control cracking as it wet cures. I won't outlast these installations.

Perimeter Bog Filters

Another favorite at zoos and



We capped EcoBlox settling chambers with gravel (top). We then filled it with gravel (middle) and planted native marginals. Ancient Roman "spurcicia" traps in aqueducts (bottom) cleaned and cleared drinking water for centuries. Now, EcoBlox and a vault trap sediment and flush clean by opening a drain valve, while plants remove nutrients and suppress algae blooms.



Clockwise from top left: There is a little liner between the EcoBlox and the bluff. The rest has been capped with geotextile and the first coat of fiber-reinforced concrete (FRC). Edwin is texturing the final coat of FRC to match the bluff before painting. The bluff is textured, painted and weathered, the liner protected and undetectable. The running feature is mesmerizing!

botanical gardens are Perimeter Bog Filters made with water matrix blocks. We've seen again and again that the limiting factor at such institutions isn't funding — it's labor. The caretakers have so much to do that the learning curve of technological solutions, such as advanced pond filters, puts them solidly out of reach, for no other reason than they need specialized maintenance that no one has time to learn.

Sediment traps, on the other hand, work completely in the background until you see muck, which can then be flushed away by opening and closing a valve. If you plant them, there's some pruning to be done as well, but that's

old hat too. This is the opposite of modern technology; the Romans used them to remove sediments from their aqueducts. Give moving water with suspended solids a place to slow down, and the solids will drop out. Push water into EcoBlox where the partitions will slow velocity to zero and drop out sediment. Fit a vault in the EcoBlox chamber with a bottom drain below where the water comes in, and they can be flushed clean by opening a valve. Plant up a thin layer of gravel on top of the blocks, and the plants and symbiotic bacteria will remove toxins as well. Install, then flush and prune once a year. Talk about low tech! No wonder they like them. ☘

About the Author

Whether building waterfalls in the Yucatan, working with his sons on Long Island, or serving as the Director of Product Information at Atlantic-Oase, **Demi Fortuna** still loves water gardening even after 30 years in the muck.



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Family Business



Bradley & Dave Blocksom enjoy the wilderness together

Like Father Like Son

Tips for running a successful family business

by **Bradley Blocksom**,
Pondscapes of Charlotte

A father and son working together is a common story told throughout history, with multiple different endings. It can often be a dream of father-son bonding or a nightmare of resentment and hurt feelings. In reality, the story is usually somewhere in between; similar to anything in life, it can have its ups and downs.

In this article, I will share my story up to this point with my dad and some thoughts for anyone interested in hearing what we have to say about a successful father-son business relationship. Of course, there is no road map for it because every family is different.

Childhood Memories

Ever since I can remember, we had a pond.

My dad started Pondscapes of Charlotte back in 2002 after having just gotten laid off from U.S. Airways. Times were tough with lots of uncertainty. Starting a business doesn't come without its bumps and bruises, but I was just a kid, and to me, my dad was the best pond guy in the world.

I remember the day he asked me if I could help. I was about 8 years old, getting ready for school in the morning when he asked me if I would help him rebuild a pond in our front yard. I was so excited to help on the new project that I told him I would be there to help as soon as I got home from school! He replied, "I am going to need help all day today." It was a very special treat to play hooky from school and help my dad on the pond out front. It was my first taste of pond building, and like any kid, I was just happy to be with my dad.

As I entered high school, I lost my over-the-top excitement and joy to work for my dad.



I skipped school (left) to help my dad build a pond. Dad (middle) critiques a waterfall I built. The "Top Frog's" (Dad's) pond (right).

Working for my dad included being the guy who always looked for stuff. We would be on a job site and my dad would say, "Hey Brad, see if you can find a 90-degree, 2-inch slip fitting in the trailer." I would then run to the road where I would enter the messy enclosed trailer and search for a fitting that may or may not be there. Even though I felt like not much more than an errand boy during this time, I learned the common components of a water feature and how they were made.

I grew up seeing how hard my dad would work. He would work long hours in the field then come home, make phone calls and do it all over again the next day. After working a couple of summers with him, I remember thinking I was not really sure I wanted to be working that hard the rest of my life. It looked exhausting, and from my experience after working three days in a row, I was ready for a day off to play video games at home in the air conditioning! How was I ever going to be able to work as long and hard as my dad did?

Choosing a Vocation

The summer after I graduated high school, my dad and I spent more than 40 days on the Appalachian Trail together. We hiked from Mount

Katahdin in Maine southbound all the way to Mount Washington in New Hampshire. It was a trip of a lifetime, and it's something that means more and more to us as the years go by.

It was at this time I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do the rest of my life, and my dad was just looking to spend more time with his son.

The funny thing is, two things happened during my college years that made me decide to choose a career in the pond world, and both were both opportunities presented to me by my dad.

The first was attending Pondemonium, a networking and training event put on by Aquascape Inc. There I got to meet a lot of passionate pond builders. I was exposed to some of the stunning water features at Aqualand and even got to see Aquaterra, Greg Wittstock's personal pond. I saw the passion these people had for building ponds and waterfalls and the effect it had on their customers' lives. This inspired me to change course with my life and travel down a different path and follow in my father's footsteps. Going into my sophomore year at East Carolina University, I changed my major to business management in hopes it would help me one day with my dad's business.

The second event that cemented in my head the idea of running a pond

business actually came about during the previous year's Pondemonium event I attended with my dad and Ken Walls. I was offered a summer internship at a thriving pond company in Maryland called Premier Ponds. Steve Shinholser, the owner of Premier Ponds during the time of the internship, had built an amazing team and culture around having fun, changing lives and making money. And we did all three!

Entering the "Real World"

After I graduated college, I entered into the "real world" and started working full time at Pondscapes of Charlotte. It took some time to adjust, and I faced some difficult situations along the way. I was very green, and my dad had years of experience at running the business and building ponds. I think he knew that the only way I was going to learn and improve was by experience, and that's why he would put me in those situations. At the time, I hated the uncomfortable feeling of not being able to solve a problem or know what to say.

My parents never pressured me to stay at Pondscapes of Charlotte. They always wanted me to pursue whatever would make me happy. I am very grateful for that, and there were times when

I felt overwhelmed and even thought about what it would be like to have a job with low stress. There were times in my mid-20s when I even thought about what it would be like to move and start a pond company somewhere else.

There was a long time where I did not do any of the building. I was the helper for years, assisting the guy who would build. Whenever I decided I would try to build a little, it felt like every rock I put down would be moved or adjusted by my dad. Sometimes it felt like I could do nothing right as a builder. I felt like I was

not learning or improving as quickly as I wanted to, and over time, this became more and more frustrating. I wanted to be the one who could finally build the waterfall on a project!

To be fair, my dad is an amazing artist. He has built some of the most incredible things I have ever seen in my life, including a chainsaw carving of water pouring out of a bucket. I would always be sitting next to him as he built a waterfall with a bucket of gravel and shovel, ready to help when needed. He would tell me time and time again what he was doing and explain in detail



Hiking the Appalachian Trail is a highlight of time spent with my dad.

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the right and wrong ways to do it.

Passing the Torch

It finally came to the boiling point where my dad gave me full reins on a project for a local plant nursery. I would be tearing out a pond he built 10 years before and rebuilding it. I had a team to help, but I was going to be the man in charge, laying the rock and running the project! The project was in a place of high visibility, so it not only had to look great but also function properly.

During construction of the pond, we broke irrigation pipes. We had to maneuver a machine around a highly trafficked storefront. We had to work in front of an audience of customers and employees from the nursery who all had questions about what we were doing to the lovely pond. Up to that point, it was the most stressful week of my life, but when we got done, the pond looked good, and I felt extremely relieved and accomplished.

To my disbelief, two days later I found out the pond was losing water. My heart sank, and the stress came back. Normally in a situation like this, my dad would come to the rescue. But in this case, I was in charge, and I was the one who needed to solve the problem. After a couple of visits, I was



This chainsaw art was crafted by my dad, Dave Blocksom.

able to find the low edge in the liner and fix the leak. I was also able to get in contact with the irrigation company, and we got the irrigation lines fixed. Today, all the issues are fixed, and the display pond is thriving!

Lessons Learned

That pond taught me to think multiple steps ahead while building ponds and also gave me more experience recognizing and overcoming problems that always tend to pop up on projects. All that wouldn't be possible if it wasn't for all those years being the helper and watching my dad build ponds and waterfalls.

During the years that have followed, my father has let me build and lead more jobs. Although there is always

something that can be improved on every job, I have continued to learn better and at a faster rate as I have been given more responsibilities.

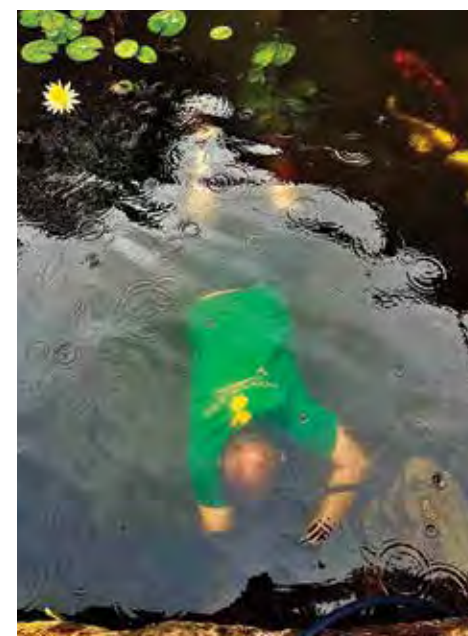
As I look back on my pond life to this point, I can see how far we have come as a family business and how I have changed over the years. I look back on some of the most impacting things that have happened in my life and realize that many are opportunities afforded by my mom and dad. Letting me play hooky from school to help build a pond, taking me to my first Pondemonium event, setting me up with an internship at a great company, and giving me the opportunity to lead jobs and learn from my mistakes are all examples of opportunities I grew from. As time goes by, I become more and more grateful for the

parents that I have.

If I were to offer any advice to other fathers and sons who are working together in a family business, it would be the following.

To the father, sometimes you have to let your son fail for him to learn. You can tell him over and over what to do, but you cannot keep him under your wing forever. It is important to teach him and give him advice, but eventually you need to let him go out and learn it on his own. If you don't allow your son to make mistakes, he will never be ready to handle tough situations when you are not there.

To the son, the wisest thing you can do is listen to your father. He has years of experience and only wants to pass that experience on to you. You do not



Dad leads by example, changing a light underwater.

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My dad has taught me everything I need to know about caring for pondscapes.



always have to agree with your father on all business decisions he makes, but you can learn from the result of them, and you should respect that it is his decision as long as it is his company.

It is always important to keep in mind that your relationship with your father always comes first before

anything else. If both the father and son believe that, everything will be all right.

Today I am still under my father's wing. I do not own Pondscapes of Charlotte, but I have grown to be more comfortable in tough situations the more I face them. And I know that even when the time comes and owner-

ship of the business transfers to me, we will keep working together. I expect to continue to lean on him for his advice, and I have no doubt that the relationship we got to build throughout all the years will always be strong. ☺

About the Author

Although only 29 years old, **Bradley Blocksom** has been active in the pond world for quite some time now. Under the guidance and direction of his father Dave Blocksom, who started Pondscapes of Charlotte in 2002, Bradley has been able to climb the ranks. Bradley enjoys building water features and loves being part of a team of motivated young individuals. Bradley plans on transitioning to ownership at Pondscapes and continuing in his father's footsteps. www.pondscapesofcharlotte.com



| Language of Koi |



Arctic Aquatics

Winter checklists for northern ponds

by **Carolyn Weise**,
Ecological Laboratories Inc.

Ponds in areas that can reach freezing temperatures need special attention to ensure any fish can survive the winter. If this is your customer's first winter with their beautiful koi pond, they need to know that there are some changes in the pond that cannot be avoided as the fall season heads into winter. In preparation, will they cover the pond, or will they choose to enjoy it in its raw elemental beauty? Any lilies should be cleaned of dead or dying foliage and then placed at the bottom of the pond if the pond is sufficiently deep to overwinter (3 to 5 feet deep) and will not take up space needed for the fish.

Things to Consider

New pond owners need to know the exact volume and, for overwintering fish, the depth of their pond. This does not mean a ballpark guess. In northern

areas, all fish do best in adequately deep ponds. I do hear a lot of people say, "In my area, we are not allowed to have a pond deeper than 18 inches," and then they put koi in that pond. The truth is they can probably have a deeper pond if they are willing to have a security fence around it.

Know the size, type and amount of fish, type of fish. Are there koi, goldfish or other species? What frost zone are they in? What is the potential duration of freeze? If the pond might freeze for any length of time, there will be a danger of carbon dioxide toxicity buildup and oxygen depletion. Is the plumbing protected from severe cold? Are they able to leave a pump running to circulate the pond, while turning off waterfalls and streams that might freeze? Will they be able to remove and store the pump in water for the winter?

Is the pond overly full of fish? Is the pond in an area with wind protection? (Berm? Buildings? Fences?) For the safety of the fish and others during heavy snow, is the pond clearly marked? Is there a

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plan to keep a sufficient space open in the ice if needed? If they have an auto-refill feature, do you have a date to blow out the lines for winter?

Emergencies happen! Are they stocked up on Dechlorinator? Will they have a hospital tank and a place indoors if necessary to use it? What about the proper bacteria to cycle it? Will they have their hoses staying warm & dry, indoors, in case of emergency? If they leave for the holidays or the whole winter, do you store your customers' fish?

Early Preparation

Those who know what works in ponds may not be available during winter season. Early preparation is the best defense. When asked, pond owners are generally looking for the same results as the pond professionals — both want to promote healthy fish that can withstand a cold, hard winter. They want a clean pond and no fish losses.

You are their guru. Once the pond is built, they need you to help them reduce stress on the fish while facing their first winter with the pond.

Here are the biggest winter stresses on koi:

1. **Cold.** Koi are poikilotherms (cold blooded) and cannot warm each other up. They will be as warm as the water temperature. The ideal tempera-

ture range for koi is between 59°F (13°C) and 77°F (25°C), but if they are in good shape, they can withstand temperatures down to 34°F (1°C) for brief periods in winter. The issue is that in shallow ponds (1 to 2 feet), the 34°F (1°C) temperature at the bottom of the pond means the top may be frozen, factoring into account icy winds and falling night temperatures.

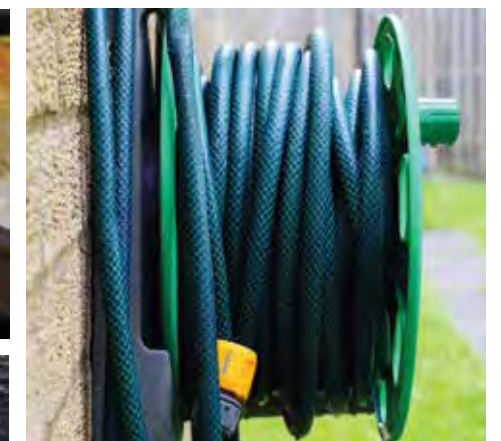
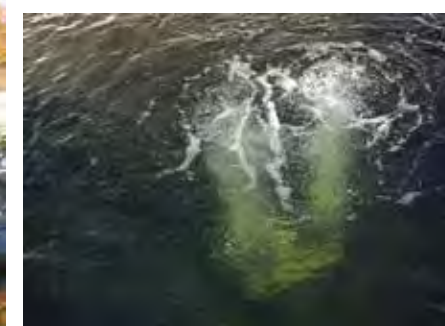
2. **Overcrowding.** Heavy stocking density is stressful to fish at any time, but in winter, the fish under ice are stressed due to oxygen shortage. Even while not eating, the fish give off carbon dioxide and take in oxygen while at rest (torpor). Ammonia is also a by-product of their dormant breathing. If the pond has enough opening at the surface to allow carbon dioxide release, will those fish in the areas away from that opening be able to survive on the available oxygen in the water? The more fish, the more oxygen used and CO₂ given off. When oxygen is in short supply, the largest fish will die first.

3. **Poor water conditions.** Winter is the setting for the never-ending onslaught of falling leaves, most of which seem to end up in the bottom of the pond. Degrading leaves are a perfect storm for parasites and disease. Leaves may also lower the pH in the water over the winter. If leaves are allowed to build

up in the bottom of the pond year after year, they can produce toxic gas over time, turning to methane. If fish or frogs die in the water, the ammonia produced can become toxic to your fish by spring.

4. **Predators.** Herons, osprey and other predators need to eat through winter and find easy prey in backyard ponds. During winter, trees are bare, and pond plants are dormant, giving little or no protection to the fish. Raccoons do not swim for their meal but will readily take a fish left behind by the heron.

5. **Cold-water parasites.** Ich, chiladonella, flukes, anchorworm, trichodina, fish lice and costia are all pond parasites that thrive in cold water. Of these, the Ich, flukes, anchorworm, costia and lice are deadly in a short period of time, especially when the fish are cold stressed and have no functioning immune system. Trichodina is common in ponds and easily killed by pond salt; they will make fish super-uncomfortable. While Malachite Green is the most effective treatment for these parasites, the treatment with formalin cannot be used at temperatures below 50°F. The other issue is that mid-winter, most pond owners are not able to recognize a problem. Fish immune systems are not fully functional until the water is at 70°F. So, while treat-



While we may like a multicolored pond (far left), overstocking it is stressful to the fish. Argulus, or fish lice (middle, top) are just one type of deadly parasite that prey on our koi. Use an aerator (middle, bottom) to keep an opening during winter. Keep your hose (above) indoors for the winter, where it will be handy in case of emergency.

ing a problem earlier may remove the problem, the fish cannot help with the healing process. People may notice that their fish do not seem to be healing. That would be correct. They cannot do much about healing until the pond water is warm enough to support their immune systems. It does not mean the fish requires subsequent treatment. This is a frustrating time for the fish owners, i.e., simply a waiting period.

6. **Pond Construction.** While not especially the prettiest, the cleanest pond is the one with bottom drains and tangential pond returns. This leaves no stagnant areas or places for uneaten food and fish waste to gather on the bottom. It leaves no organic waste to be vacuumed or netted out. It is a continually functioning system. Pond construction can prevent predator attacks through the addition of rocks and plants along the perimeter to make it more difficult for one to chase and catch the fish; and it will not have plant ledges, also known as predator feeding stations. While pleas-



Every pond should have a thermometer to ensure that feeding stops around 50°F. That's too cold to feed!

ing to the eye, these become stressors for the fish.

Yes, fall is the beautiful unraveling of the summer season. The lovely tree-leaves display will soon be on the ground and in the pond. As surely as fall follows summer, we will see cold winds

and cooler nights. The days will grow shorter. Koi will go into torpor as the temperature drops and their metabolism slows down. A clean pond as we enter winter months is important.

Facts & Myths

Pond owners want a product or products that will help relieve the stress of the coming season with its potential issues, but what they need is the education about what they can do at each time of year. There is no scientific data to prove that fish will die as the result of winter feeding or that undigested food will rot in their stomachs.

I used my fish to experiment one year. I fed them through the winter months, and each time they came to the side, looking for food even though the water was below 50°F. No fish died. They all remained happy and healthy. When I moved to Florida, I was told that fish that are fed all year live half as long as those that have the winter sleep. Is that

fact or myth?

Here are a few more facts and myths:

1. **Breaking the Ice.** When the pond is completely covered with ice, will I kill my fish by using a hammer to break the ice? Probably not outright, but your fish will waste good energy trying to escape the noise that takes them hours or days to recover from, especially if you do this repeatedly. Stress does kill fish.

2. **Supercooling.** Water exposed to air-cooled temperatures, such as that within a waterfall or stream, can supercool ponds by quickly dropping the water temperature, commonly as the sun goes down. A sudden decrease in temperature can negatively stress your koi. If you have an external water feature, it is recommended to bypass it during very cold weather conditions.

3. **Oxygen Access.** Even in torpor, your fish will need oxygen to survive. A solid-ice surface cuts off fish from life-saving oxygen. You must keep an opening at the water's surface in order to keep your fish alive. You can do this by installing a pond deicer or aerator. Pond deicers work by thawing a small area of your pond surface in order to allow for air to penetrate into the water and the release of CO₂. These need to be checked frequently in order to ensure proper function. They do not heat the whole pond, only a small area of the water at the pond surface. They are primarily thermally activated. When using an aerator, you do not want to bring the warmer water from the bottom of the pond to the surface using a bubbler on the bottom. These air stones should be placed just below the surface in the winter.

4. **Crowding.** Although not scientific, an easy way to figure a safe number of koi in the pond, at any time, would be a minimum of 10 gallons per 1 inch of fish. Remember that koi can grow to 36 inches at full size. This is beneficial in feeding, creates less stress for the fish and results in much better water quality.

5. **Evaporation.** When my pond is covered with ice, can water evaporate? Yes. The water level must be monitored. Use Dechlorinator before adding new water.

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6. **KH.** Do I have to monitor the KH in winter? Yes, you may prevent a pH crash.

7. **Ammonia.** Do I have to worry about ammonia spikes in winter? The danger is when water begins to warm.

8. **Sick Fish.** What can I do if I find a sick fish in the middle of winter? In order to be effective, most treatments should be done at 70°F when the fish have their full immune system working. This allows the fish to heal while you treat whatever is causing the problem. The best scenario would be to bring the sick fish indoors, where it will need to remain for the rest of the winter.

9. **Frozen Pipes.** If you experience broken pipes due to the low temperatures, the pond can empty rapidly, leaving fish high and dry on the bottom. The best scenario would be a temporary pond in the house or garage to house them until spring, when you can fix the plumbing.

Armed with this list of potential problems, hopefully nobody's pond should have trouble on your watch in winter. A problem anticipated is trouble prevented. Take care of business and have an uneventful winter!

About the Author

Carolyn Weise is the customer relations manager for Ecological Laboratories, Inc. She studied ornamental horticulture at the State University of New York at Farmingdale. She moved to Florida in 2006 to work at the Cape Coral campus of Ecological Laboratories. Today, Carolyn serves as a liaison to koi clubs and recently joined the master gardener's program in Lee County. She loves her work. For additional information on pond management, nitrification and denitrification, contact her at carolyn.weise@ecologicalabs.com



Best Practices



Recently bought a new home? Time to get a new pond!

Repeat Business

Second time around for formal koi & turtle pond

by Kent Wallace,
Living Water Solutions

Revisiting Paradise

Their previous pond was a 7,500-gallon formal entry pond with large steps through the pond leading to the front door, as shown in the articles from the May/June ("Hold the Shotcrete") and September/October 2016 ("Finishing up the Formal Pond") issues of POND Trade magazine. The new pond is to be more of a garden setting, at about 10,000 gallons with a separate habitat for the turtles, which were previously in the koi pond with the fish. The backyard is large, with the house surrounding the pond, patio, outdoor kitchen and pool. Waterfalls were not an option, as the pond is surrounded by glass on both sides of the house, and no one wants to look at the back of a waterfall. The plan was to build low, spring-like spills between the pond and the house so the water sources are slightly hidden by the landscape.

The equipment area is about 300 feet away

It's not often that you get a chance to design more than one pond for a customer. I've been fortunate enough to have that happen a handful of times. The client will move, or in one instance, just jump from one general contractor to another.

SERIES: Best Pond Practices

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

This last pond was almost two years in the making. The clients sold their dream house only to build another larger dream home in a more rural area without a homeowner's association. I've had their fish and turtles in quarantine for the entire time, and it's time to take them back. Woo hoo!

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on the west side of the house in an area shared by the pool equipment — not quite enough space, but better than most I get to deal with. The two Aqua-Niche in-pond, shelf-mounted skimmers and a midwater drain flow to a Wave 1 ¼-Hp Wlim pump at about 7,000 gph. This water is sent through a Wlim EZR up-flow sand and gravel filter and flows back to the pond through a 4-inch line, which is split into four 2-inch returns at the head of each spring return with an additional valved 2 inch as a bypass in case the water flow needs to be reduced to the returns.

Three of my 4-by-3 vertical pond return drains are spaced along the floor, with those three 4-inch lines flowing to a radial separator of my own design. I would usually use a Wlim Wave 48 tank for this, but the pool plumbing went right under one edge of where that tank needed to go. The Wave 48 was too deep, so I used a shorter 300-gallon water tank that would fit in the space. The tank is mounted upside down, placing the cone-shaped top at the bottom. The existing tank top was removed and sealed with a circular piece of PVC cut to fit. The bottom of the tank is now the top and was cut open a couple of inches in from the edge, leaving a 2-inch return for strength.

Creative License

My first choice for gravity flow returns to the vertical pond return

The final edge dimension (far left) is determined by batter board. The plumbing trench (top) has seven 4" lines, three 2.5" lines and three ¾" lines. In-pond plumbing (middle) leads to VPR drains. Three 4" return lines (right) lead from shower filter to VPR returns and 1.5" return lines. Shotcrete (right) is coated with Bond coat and ready for Polyurea.

drains would normally be an airlift inside an aerated biofilter for maximum dissolved oxygen content, but there wasn't enough room for a 3-foot diameter tank buried in the ground. This led me to using a shower filter of my own design. The bottom of the shower filter collection tank is slightly below water level, preventing any burping that occurs when water is returning to a pond from above water level. In gravity-flow tanks above water level, the returning water flow will draw air with it, causing burping and bubbling in the pond unless you install an air purge chamber to allow the air to escape first. Slightly submerging the lower catch basin solves the problem without needing the purge chamber because the tank becomes the purge chamber.

The shower is fed by a Wlim Wave 1 ½-Hp pump. Three 4-inch outlets in the bottom of the tank lead back to the pond. Each of these 4-inch lines are split just before an individual bottom drain into one 3-inch for the vertical return and two 1 ½-inch side returns near the floor, for a total of six side returns.

Weathering the Heat

Once the shotcrete was completed and the surface was parged with a BondKote, Paul Parszik of Artisan Aquatics came in to



Polyurea is complete, with extra poly on spring returns to be trimmed as necessary.



We rocked the edge from the ledge up.

apply the polyurea. It was a brutal 112 degrees every day that week, so a large cooler was attached to one end of the protective tent. But it was still rough!

Monte Malloy's crew at M&M Masonry rocked the edge and created the return spills all in that same temperature range. Some sections of black Mexican river pebble were added to the edge to blend in with the pebble being used in the landscape. This helped integrate the edge with the surrounding surfaces.

Three Medo 45-lpm air pumps on a timer power the aerator rings on the drain covers. I've opted to use multiple smaller pumps instead of one larger air pump with valves to balance them, because in the past, it has been a little bit of a challenge to keep them balanced without constant adjustment. I've also started using inline check valves to prevent water from migrating up the line under the pond when the pumps are off. The 87-watt LWS Flow-free UV light is mounted in the center of the EZR up-flow sand and gravel filter as a downflow unit, eliminating the need to mount it externally.

Time for fish! They're finally out of quarantine after almost two years in my 1,500-gallon quarantine tank. I think they're actually bigger after being fed Kenzen all that time! ☺



About the Author

Kent Wallace was born and raised in Las Vegas. Kent spent most of his adult life in the automobile industry at independent shops and dealerships, including his own shop as a race car fabricator at age 24. Then, in 2001 a neighbor asked Kent if he could build her a koi pond like the one Kent's father had. From that point on, pond building became his new passion. That first pond he built was submitted to Better Homes & Gardens magazine and won Best Courtyard Nationwide in their special interest publication.

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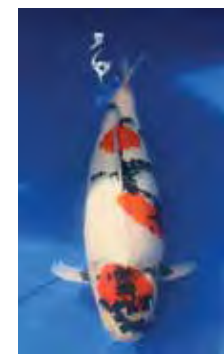
Tiered Basalt Fountain Kit from EasyPro

Create a relaxing experience with the Tiered Basalt Fountain from EasyPro. This new addition to their Tranquil Decor line comes in a kit, so everything you need to create a beautiful vignette in your outdoor space is included! Three real basalt pillars measure 8", 20" and 27" tall, each with a diameter of 12 to 18", basin, pump, plumbing kit and light kit. To request your full color catalog or for more information about EasyPro products, call 800/448-3873 or visit www.easypro.com.



Northern Midwest ZNA Koi Show & Pond Expo

The Gateway Koi and Pond Club will host the 21st Annual Northern Midwest ZNA Koi Show & Pond Expo on September 22-24, 2023. The event will be held at Timberwinds Nursery in Ellisville, Missouri, and is open to the public with free admission. Hours are Friday 3 -5 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m., and Sunday 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. There will be raffles, attendance prizes, koi judging and speakers on various topics of ponding and gardening Saturday, along with the judges' talk and tour of the tanks on Sunday at 10 a.m. Show koi will be removed from tanks on Sunday at noon for transport home. Koi, goldfish, and pond and garden-related vendors will be open all three days. Timberwinds Nursery carries a wide variety of high-quality plants, shrubs and trees along with decorative garden and gift items.



Come enjoy the beautiful living jewels of Japan! Fun for the whole family! Outdoor event — rain or shine! The main show sponsor is PSKoi, Russ Peters.

The show schedule is available at www.nmzna.net and www.gatewaykoiandpondclub.org.



Koi Market Announces Strategic Partnership with Aquascape, Inc.; Welcomes Industry Veteran Mike Varrone as New Head of Sales

Koi Market Aquatic Nursery & Bonsai, one of the USA's largest Japanese koi importers and a leader in koi health care, pond supplies, pond construction and maintenance, is excited to announce the addition of Mike Varrone, a seasoned professional with more than 36 years of experience in the pond industry. Mike joins Koi Market as the new head of sales.

With his extensive, intimate knowledge of the products used in every aspect of pond and waterfall feature design, Mr. Varrone is uniquely suited to his new role. In fact, Mike is particularly familiar with the world of the pond hobby, having worked as a Certified Aquascape Pond Champion at Bissett Nursery, Siteone and Aquascape. Mr. Varrone will play a critical role in steering Koi Market Aquatic Nursery & Bonsai's new partnership with Aquascape, a renowned innovator in the water garden industry.



The company is also pleased to announce it has become an Aquascape distributor, a move that will expand the business to include stocking Aquascape pond supplies for wholesale to pond installers and Certified Aquascape Contractors (CACs).

To make this service more accessible, a new distribution side will be launched on Koi Market Aquatic Nursery & Bonsai's website, providing installers with the option to purchase products directly online. This expansion comes with a dedicated commitment to providing comprehensive, high-quality solutions for both residential and commercial applications, from the smallest water garden to advanced recreational water features.

Aquascape, known for their innovative, ecosystem-based approach to designing, building, and maintaining water features, aligns with Koi Market Aquatic Nursery & Bonsai's commitment to quality, sustainability, and environmental responsibility. Through this partnership, the company will offer Aquascape's premium products to their clients, further cementing their reputation as a comprehensive provider of Koi and pond solutions.

The team at Koi Market Aquatic Nursery & Bonsai is enthusiastic about this new partnership and the opportunities it presents for their customers. With their new hire and expanded services, they are poised to serve an even broader range of needs in the aquatic gardening industry.

For more information about Koi Market Aquatic Nursery & Bonsai, visit www.koimarket.com or call 516/809-6771.



Leading the Charge: Airmax Launches Solar-Powered Pond and Lake Equipment

Airmax, the leading manufacturer of pond and lake solutions for over 25 years, is pleased to announce its SolarSeries lineup. The Airmax SolarSeries is the premier alternative energy solution, delivering two high-performance aeration systems and an aerating floating fountain.

The Airmax SolarSeries lineup, like all Airmax systems, is engineered to be the best in class, making them long lasting, easy to install, and simple to maintain. Unlike other solar systems, the Airmax SolarSeries comes standard with American-made, high-output solar panels for maximum performance.

SolarSeries Aeration

Aeration increases water circulation and oxygen saturation. In addition, aeration improves water clarity, supports fish health and reduces muck and algae. Airmax SolarSeries aeration includes:

- zero operating costs with 100% renewable energy
- easy installation, low maintenance and quiet operation
- two high-quality, high-output American made solar panels
- maximum circulation and oxygen saturation with best-in-class diffusers
- direct drive or battery backup model options

SolarSeries Fountain

Decorative fountains add show-stopping visuals to any pond or lake. In addition, fountains add the tranquil sound of falling water and provide aeration for ponds up to 6 feet deep. The Airmax SolarSeries fountain includes:

- zero operating costs with 100% renewable energy
- four high-quality, high-output American made solar panels
- up to 12 hours of daytime operation, producing beautiful, crisp fountain displays
- three spray patterns that vary in size depending on sunlight exposure, adding interest and variety
- easy installation, low maintenance and durable construction

For more information on the SolarSeries and the complete Airmax product line, visit www.airmaxeco.com.



Mark Your Calendar for the Water Garden Expo!

Pondliner.com is excited to announce that the Water Garden Expo will be held Feb. 28 – March 1, 2024, at the Grand Casino Hotel & Resort in Shawnee, Oklahoma.

The Water Garden Expo kicks off on Wednesday afternoon with contractor boot camps to teach in-depth business concepts and processes.

The presentation of POND Trade's 2023 Artisans of the Year will kick off Thursday morning with 21 seminars following over the next two days. Three educational tracks will provide learning opportunities for all knowledge levels. Attendees can visit with the largest gathering of manufacturers of any trade show and network with successful professionals from across the country and beyond.

As always, the Water Garden Expo is free to attend and open to trade professionals only. Visit www.wgexpo.com or call 866/219-3561 to register or for more information.



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See them at: www.shopbluethumb.com/fire-water-boulder-fountain-kit/

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Fitz's Fish Ponds Delivers 39" Yamabuki to Shaquille O'Neal!

In early June 2023, Fitz Fish Ponds had the opportunity to deliver an amazing koi to an amazing client. A 39-inch Yamabuki from the breeder Izuymia in Niigata, Japan, was delivered to Shaquille O'Neal!

As some may know, Aquascape was working on a major pond project at Shaquille O'Neal's Georgia residence. Brian Fitzsimmons, CEO and owner of Fitz Fish Ponds, drove the koi coined "Shakoi O'Neal" from New Jersey to Georgia along with AJ Mandell & Tim Waddington of Quality Nishikigoi who flew in from the U.K. to help make the trip.

Leading up to delivery day, Fitz and the team at FFP wanted to reveal the koi to Shaq in style. Rae Cauley, a Green Brook retail store associate, also doubles as an extremely talented artist and designed and painted a custom box for "Shakoi" to be delivered in. She incorporated some of Shaq's emblems such as the Superman logo, our FFP Logo, Shaq's basketball numbers and his dunking logo as well as a depiction of the stellar Yamabuki.

To transport the koi, the Yamabuki was placed in a shipping bag with plenty of oxygen and water for the trip. Fitz, AJ and Tim rented a van and began their trip to Georgia. Koi are able to stay bagged up in transport for 48 hours, so the koi was more than safe during their travel, especially with this highly trained team escorting and monitoring the koi!

When they arrived in Georgia, the proper acclimation steps were followed to introduce the koi to Shaq's beautiful new pond; however, for the unveiling, the koi was rebagged and presented to Shaq himself!

Fitz and the FFP team is so glad that Shaq loves his new koi — he even jokingly commented on the koi's impressive size by wanting to name it "Charles Barkley." He also gave Brian Fitzsimmons and Fitz Fish Ponds a direct shout out!

To share this exciting experience with customers, family and friends, Fitz posted a TikTok and Instagram reel that showed Shaq's reaction to the koi. Much to their surprise, this was making headlines in the news the following day. Articles were written in The New York Post and on Talkbasket.net titled "Shaquille O'Neal buys huge fish and uses it to troll Charles Barkley." More articles were written on OutKick.com and Hot New Hip Hop Today with the similarly titled, "SHAKOI O'NEAL! SHAQ NOW OWNS A MASSIVE KOI SHIPPED IN FROM JAPAN, NAMES IT 'CHARLES BARKLEY'"

It is pretty amazing for Fitz's Fish Ponds and Brian Fitzsimmons to get mentioned in the videos and articles online alongside Shaq! Fitz and the FFP team are excited to see what comes from this opportunity and, as always, are happy and proud to be able to provide interested customers with some of the highest-quality Japanese imported koi in the world.



Introducing the New Oase FiltoClear

Oase introduces the next generation of their best-selling FiltoClear Pressurized Pond Filter. A perennial favorite for its versatility, ease of cleaning and the Clear Water Guarantee, the FiltoClear line has always offered excellent water clarification in an easy-to-hide package. Now it's even better, with more capacity, more UVC power, better cleaning and simpler operation.

A sleeker, new UVC housing design provides higher power to UVC bulbs and allows simpler removal for maintenance. A new two-way valve allows a quarter turn that more efficiently backwashes the filter without shutting the pump. The FiltoClear is easier to clean, with a new handle, sponges and sponge supports that maintain optimal internal geometry, enhance waste removal, eliminate a dirty water bypass and keep sponges from collapsing.



It allows for simpler UV bulb replacement with no need to turn off the pump. The UVC can be replaced during operation without removing the quartz glass sleeve. Simply twist and change.

A redesigned FiltoCap in stone gray perfectly camouflages all three FiltoClear sizes in the landscape.

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User-friendly designs make installation a breeze. Simply connect the clarifier to your pond system by using the 1-1/2" of 4-section hose barb (available in 3/4", 1", 1-1/4", 1-1/2" and 2" half union).

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The clarifiers are built to last with UV-resistant housing and high-grade quartz sleeves for maximum efficiency.

For more info, go to matalausa.com.



Animal & Nature Sanctuary
farmhousesanctuary.org

Charity Golf Scramble to Benefit Farmhouse Animal & Nature Sanctuary

Farmhouse Animal & Nature Sanctuary, a 501c3 nonprofit exotic and farm animal sanctuary, will be hosting its first annual Farmhouse Scramble golf outing fundraiser on Saturday, Oct. 21, 2023 at Tatum Ridge Golf Links located at 421 Tatum Road in Sarasota, Florida.

This will be an 18-hole scramble format event beginning at 8 a.m. and will be filled with plenty of fun and excitement, including contests, games and prizes. Golfers will enjoy complimentary practice balls, a light breakfast prior to play, golfer goodie bags and a cookout-style lunch with a prize presentation following play. FANS hopes to raise funds to help care for the animals and finish repairs for damage the sanctuary sustained during Hurricane Ian.

Dave and Lisa Burns, owners of Backyard Getaway since 2004, an outdoor living and water feature business, are founders of FANS. When not building water features and renovating backyards, Dave and Lisa are caring for the 139 animals, from horses, goats and chickens to kangaroos, prairie dogs and tortoises that live at the sanctuary. Dave has built several water features at the sanctuary, including a faux rock waterfall and pond for Muscovy and mallard ducks, a stream in the tortoise digs habitat and a weeping-wall feature in the aviary's cockatiel condo.

The animals come to the sanctuary for many reasons, including neglect, abandonment, medical needs or the inability of their family to care for them. The majority will spend the rest of their lives at the sanctuary, while some may be made available for adoption into forever homes. While they continue to give the animals a place to feel safe, Dave and Lisa's goal, along with their board of directors and volunteers, is to teach a new generation the joy of caring for animals and to educate the public on proper animal care.

There are several sponsorship opportunities available. To learn more or to donate to FANS, visit www.farmhousesanctuary.org. To learn about FANS, visit www.farmhousesanctuary.org, and check out Backyard Getaway at www.backyardgetaway.net.

MARKETPLACE



Ecological Laboratories Revolutionizes Bio-dredging and Weed Prevention in Ponds and Lakes

Microbe-Lift by ELI BioScience proudly unveils its groundbreaking technology for bio-dredging and weed prevention in ponds and lakes. Powered by Microbe-Lift's advanced natural microbial consortium, this approach fosters ecological balance and reduces reliance on aquatic herbicides.

Microbe-Lift/PBL, an exceptionally stable liquid consortium, distinguishes itself through its unique blend of bacteria. This comprehensive microbial technology restores the health of ponds and lakes by utilizing multiple pathways, including aerobic and anaerobic oxidation reduction, anoxic respiration for denitrification, and photosynthetic microorganisms for lysis control.

Complementing the Microbe-Lift/PBL solution is Microbe-Lift/SA, a liquid bio-stimulant enriched with humic and fulvic acid, and a diverse culture blend. This accelerates the oxidation reduction of challenging organic matter, expediting the restoration process. Customers have experienced significant cost savings compared to dredging bids through the Ecological biological program.

The exceptional benefits of Microbe-Lift technology include:

- **Reduction in Herbicide Usage:** Integrating Microbe-Lift technology reduces herbicide usage in lakes and ponds by 60 to 90% over 24 months, resulting in reduced weed pressure and decreased reliance on herbicides.

- **Bottom Sludge Degradation and Prevention:** Microbe-Lift technology targets and degrades organic bottom sludge, restoring water quality and clarity.

- **Organic Nutrient Load Reduction:** Microbe-Lift technology achieves a remarkable reduction of 60% to 90% in residual organic nutrient loading, benefiting fish and aquatic life by minimizing ammonia and nitrate buildup and improving oxygen conditions.

Microbe-Lift technology has undergone rigorous testing and validation, ensuring its efficacy and environmental integrity. With over 1,000 successful implementations worldwide, it has effectively addressed nutrient cycling, bottom-solids reduction, water clarity, fish health, and prevention of aquatic weeds.

ELI BioScience is actively expanding the distribution and application of its technology globally. The company is committed to delivering innovative, natural, and highly effective microbial products that empower water resource managers to foster thriving and resilient aquatic ecosystems.

Press contact: Brett Richter, info@ecologicallabs.com



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FINAL THOUGHT...

Fall-elujah!

Photo courtesy of Larry Carnes, Reflections Water Gardens



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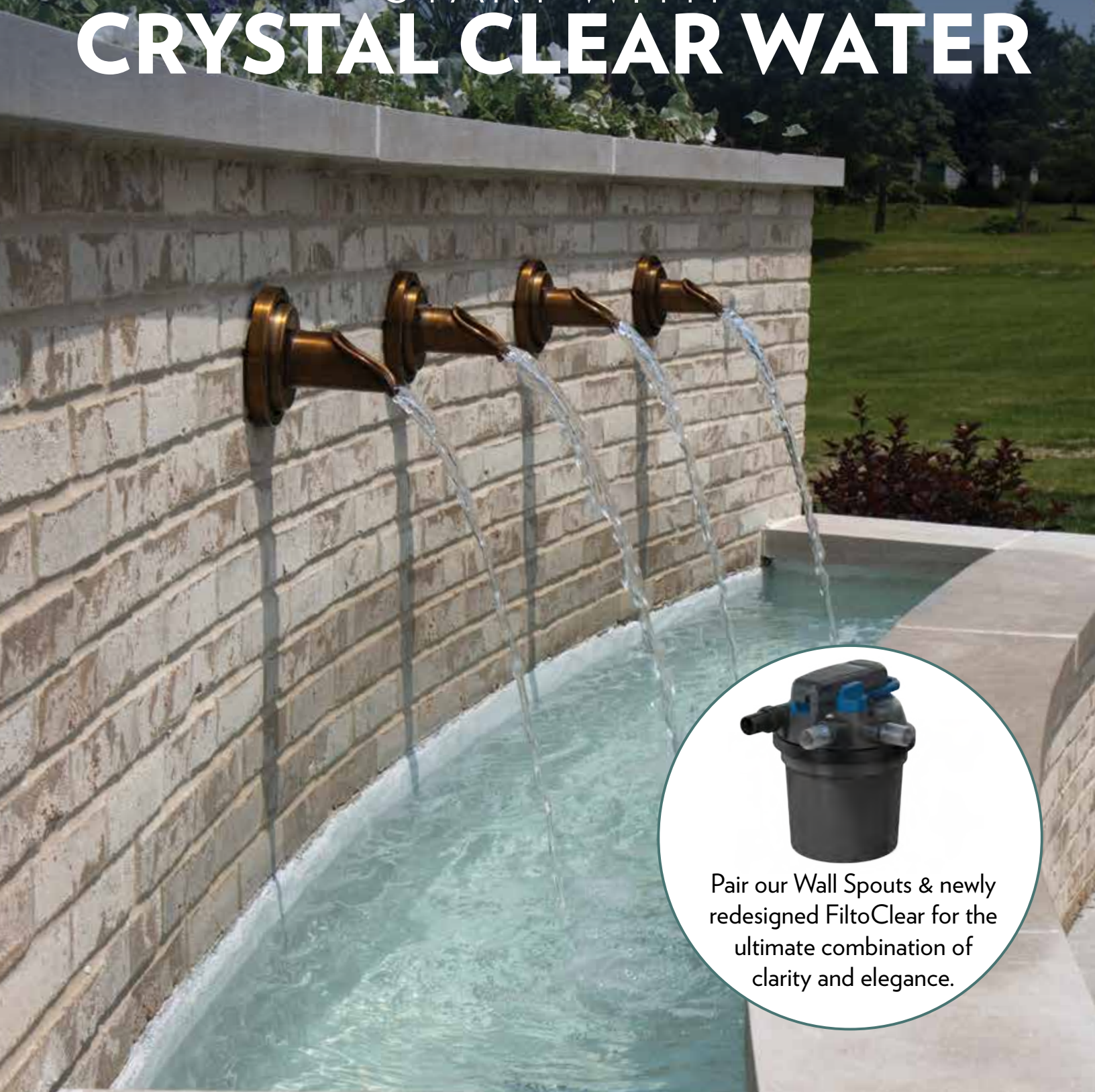
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