Planning a Water Garden

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Adding a water feature to your garden increases interest, enhances beauty and helps attract wildlife. Water features range from small containers to large ponds and waterfalls. You can purchase pre-formed plastic liners to create small ponds, purchase plastic or rubber sheeting to create a pond of your own design or use various water tight containers to create miniature water gardens.

Even small gardens can add a water feature with the selection of barrels and pots available at a garden center. Or, look around and recycle by using an old tub or other watertight container.

Before you install any of these you need to do some basic planning. First, decide what you want to accomplish with the water feature. Is it to house flowering water plants? Is it to provide a sanctuary for wildlife such as frogs, fish, birds, dragonflies? Do you want the soothing sound of moving water to be heard near a bench or patio? Do you just want a shallow reflecting pool?

The site for the water garden depends on the answer to the question above. If your main purpose is to grow flowering water plants, such as water lilies, then you will need to situate your garden in a sunny location. Water lilies and lotus require six hours of sunlight a day. Water plants grown for their foliage require less sunlight.

If you want a still reflecting pond, then it can be situated almost anywhere. However, placing this type of pond in direct sunlight will encourage algae growth. Placing it under a large tree will have the disadvantage of leaves falling into the water in the fall. Both of these aspects can be overcome but it will involve more maintenance work to keep the pond looking good.

If you want to have moving water you will need to have electricity by the water garden in order to install a fountain and pump. Having a pump for a filtration system helps keep the pond clear of algae. In all cases you will need to periodically replenish the water in the garden due to loss from evaporation. The closer the water garden is to your water source (usually a garden hose) the easier it will be to maintain the proper water level.

The spot for your pond should be level and allow for overflow from the pond. Remember, heavy rains will raise the level of the pond and the water needs to be able to drain out and not toward your house!

The depth of the pond also depends on the purpose. If you want a water feature with no plants or fish then it can be relatively shallow. If it has a fountain and requires a pump then you will need to ensure it is deep enough to keep the pump submerged. Most aquatic plants can be grown in ponds that are around 18 to 24 inches deep. Keeping fish in a pond requires more depth, especially if you plan to have them winter over in the pond. In that case you need to install a pond where the center does not freeze all the way to the bottom.

Be sure and check on any zoning restrictions if you want to install a deep pond. Water gardens can be as hazardous to young children as swimming pools.
Start planning today and add a water feature to your garden.

Garden tasks for April:

- Prune spring flowering shrubs: spirea, flowering quince, azalea, viburnums, forsythia, etc just as flowers fade.
- Plant carrots, peas, lettuce, beets, radishes, cabbage and potatoes
- Stake tall perennials and peonies (don’t worry about the ants)
- Mow fescue/bluegrass lawns 2 ½ - 3 inches high
- Do not fertilize cool season lawns until September
- Apply broadleaf herbicide and/or insecticide for grub control as needed

Do you have a question for the Transylvania Extension Master Gardeners or a subject you’d like to see addressed in this column? E-mail us at manymoons@citcom.net or have your garden questions answered at our telephone clinic from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesdays, March through October. Call 884-3239 or walk-in during those hours at the Community Services Building, 98 E. Morgan St. The Transylvania Extension Master Gardener program is sponsored by the N.C. Cooperative Extension Service: www.transylvania.ces.ncsu.edu.