



Fears and Myths

Educate your customers to give them confidence to dive into water gardening

By Greg Wittstock, Founder and CEO of Aquascape, Inc.

As with anything, there are a couple of primary issues or myths about water gardening that, as a salesperson, always seem to come up when your customer is deciding whether or not to buy a water garden for their backyard. I'd like to help you dispel those myths by explaining the real truth.

Too Much Maintenance

When a customer initially inquires about water features, the first question they usually ask is, "How much maintenance is a pond like this going to require? I've heard the horror stories. Is it really worse than a swimming pool or a hot tub?" In reality, the required maintenance for a well-constructed water garden is next to nothing in comparison to a pool or a hot tub.

When you tell a prospective customer this, they can hardly believe it. They may think that you're stretching the truth, but if you explain exactly how the five elements of an ecosystem complement each other - creating a clean and healthy pond, it begins to become a reality. As you describe how their water will be crystal clear after three or four days, and how they'll see and feed their fish without green hazy interference, they will start to think, "*Hey maybe this guy's telling the truth after all. It kind of makes sense.*" The only real maintenance issues with a properly built pond are the weekly skimmer filter cleanings and one annual cleanout. It's less work than mowing the lawn.

Is This Going to Cost Me An Arm and a Leg?

The next big issue is, of course, the cost. "*It may be easy to maintain, but is this thing going to cost me an arm and a leg?*" Actually, the average cost of a beautiful, ecosystem pond, including a waterfall is about the same as a hot tub in today's market. So now your customer is pleasantly surprised for a second time.

Naturally, there are a variety of factors that go into making up the total cost of a pond including the size, the layout, and any extras like a second waterfall, lighting, or a longer stream. But the standard 11' x 16' pond falls right into the same financial ballpark as the average hot tub.

How About Fish in the Winter and Mosquitoes in the Summer?

A couple of other issues that come up on a regular basis include, "*What do you do with your fish in the winter?*" and "*Doesn't the water attract mosquitoes?*" The simple answer to the first question is that you place a small pump on the first shelf of the pond so it bubbles at the water's surface. The bubbling action will maintain a hole in the ice, allowing oxygen to get into the system, and gases to escape.

So what about mosquitoes in the summer? Mosquitoes are attracted by stagnant or still water, not constantly moving water like in a stream or waterfall. If mosquitoes do find a place in a water garden to lay their eggs, the fish will do a great job of keeping them cleaned up. Mosquitoes make an absolutely delicious meal for them.

The Do-It-Yourselfer

The do-it-yourselfer, however, will need a little more than you just squelching their fears of an excess mosquito population. A customer who is interested in buying the pond kit from you and installing it themselves will need a little more. It's critical that the kit you supply contains every single part that the customer is going to need to construct that pond the right way. The instructions have to be straightforward and easy to follow. If they're overly technical and inaccessible to the layman, it can initiate a series of problems that, as a retailer, you'll want to avoid. *(continued)*

A pond kit that is complete in every conceivable way, with user-friendly instructions and a simple paint-by-number recipe, will ensure that your customer will successfully build their own water garden. This happy customer will likely be back to buy their fish and plants from you. Their happiness is important to you.

In addition to the installation instructions included with each kit, Aquascape offers Y.E.S. (Your Extra Salesperson) brochures you can order for your customers. Each brochure is topic-specific and includes:

- Do-It-Yourself Installation
- Pump Care
- Fish Care
- Aquatic Plants
- Fall & Winter Pond Care
- Spring Care
- Water Clarity
- Water Quality
- Lights and Decorative Accents

Creativity in a Kit

Although building a pond with a kit can seem rather systematic and lacking creativity, once your customer gets it out in the yard – shovel and wheelbarrow in hand- they discover that there are still loads of opportunity for creativity. In reality, the systematic character of these pond kits allows the owner to forget about the functional necessities required by good pond construction, because all these bases are automatically covered. This allows the pond builder to really let go and focus on the creative potential inherent in every single pond that goes out of your shop.

The Pond Becomes the Geographical Hub of the Home

If you took a tour of a hundred different ponds in your area built by the homeowner, you'd probably see a hundred unique, one-of-a-kind, works of art that reflect the personal preferences and creativity of the people who designed and built them. You'd also see 100 happy customers who love their ponds, name their fish, drink their morning coffee, and read their newspaper by the pond. Then after work, they unwind with a beverage by the pond. It's almost uncanny how in every instance the pond becomes the geographical hub of the home. It's where you entertain and relax, and after a while, in a very real sense, it's where you live.

So should ponds and water features be an important part your retail and/or installation business? Yes! Ponds have the potential of contributing a great deal to your bottom line. And if you throw in all the other related landscaping activities that occur as the result of a pond installation, you'll see why so many retailers and contractors are getting their businesses involved in this growing hobby.

Five Elements of a Natural Pond Ecosystem

Circulation and Filtration

The skimmer filters the pond by skimming debris from the water surface before it sinks to the bottom. A skimmer provides a place for the pump to be hidden from view, and because the water is filtered before it makes it to the pump, the life of the pump is extended. The biological filter (Aquascape's is known a BioFalls® Filter) provides additional filtration of smaller debris, but more importantly gives bacteria a great place to grow and colonize, helping keep the water free from algae.

Bacteria

Bacteria live off the excess nutrients in the water garden – the same nutrients that algae live off of. If the more aggressive bacteria are colonizing and growing and using nutrients, there's almost nothing left to feed the algae for growth.

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Rocks and Gravel

Rocks and gravel in a pond not only make it look more natural but protect the liner from the sun's UV rays, and also provides additional surface area for more bacteria to colonize.

Plants

Plants help make a water garden look more beautiful and natural by softening hard, rocky edges. But they serve other important purposes not apparent to the eye. Lilies and other floating plants shade the water surface while marginals, like cattail and rush, absorb excess nutrients from the water – both making the conditions less than perfect for algae to grow. Plants also provide hiding and egg-laying places for fish, frogs and other critters.

Fish

The fish play an important role by eating the algae, helping to keep it in check. Koi over 10" in length, when not over-fed with commercial fish food will effectively graze on the algae in the pond.

By taking all five elements of an ecosystem in the proper proportions, the water in the pond will be naturally clear without having to resort to any artificial means to do it.

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