



# Fish in the Retail Sector

## The Pros and Cons

*By Jim Wullschleger, Territory Sales Manager for Aquascape, Inc.*

Let me start off by asking you a question. *Could you live with a mark up of anywhere from 200% to 500%?* If you answered yes, then let me also tell you that one of the only places you're going to find something like that in the water gardening market is in the good, old-fashioned retail sport of *retailing fish*.

### **Become a One-Stop Water Gardening Destination Point**

If you're really serious about winning in the retail water gardening sector, then you probably want to be a full blown, one-stop-shop, where your customers can find and buy almost anything they need for their brand new water garden. If you aspire to that level of customer service, it means you'll want to avoid *the humiliating experience of having to send your customers down the street to your competition* because you don't carry something they want to buy, like say for example ... fish.

### **Rule # 1: A Good Supplier**

Rule No. 1 in the fish retailing game is find yourself a good, reputable, and reliable supplier, and be wise enough to pay for quality instead of mere quantity. You're going to have to be willing to talk to a number of suppliers, you'll have to be willing to make a dozen or so phone calls in order to check out their references, and then stack the pros and cons of each up against the other, before you really have to finally decide. This part of the process will be a time-consuming experience, *but it's definitely well worth spending it up front, in order to avoid the rocks lurking beneath the surface that could sink your ship*.

### **Rule # 2: A Good Environment**

Rule No. 2 is that the aquatic environment that you keep your fish in is just as important as your supplier. Make sure you maintain good water quality by installing a solid filtration system that keeps your water clean and clear, and one that's designed to accommodate the heavy fish load that most retailers need to keep in stock in order to maximize their fish sales, and to produce that great profit margin, all at the same time.

Oh, and while we're on the subject, *I personally recommend a single tank, single filter system* over multiple tanks being filtered by a single filtration system. The multiple tank system is cheaper to start, but it'll cost you big time when one diseased fish infects all the rest of your fish because they are hooked into the same filtering system.

### **Rule # 3: Investing in Good Tools and Employees**

You'll also have to figure on investing in testing tools that will allow you to efficiently complete the required testing, without wasting precious man-hours to get that job done. And speaking of man hours, conscientious and intelligent employees who you can trust to conduct tests right, even if you're not right there on the premises, are also a crucial part of the success formula.

These same employees will also be responsible for being able to show the fish, net the fish, bowl the fish, sell the fish, bag the fish, and instruct customers on how to successfully transport their newfound pets from your place to theirs ... safely.

*(continued)*

#### **Rule # 4: Domestic Koi vs. Imported Koi...**

Let's turn our attention to the issue of whether you invest your hard earned dollars in domestic koi, or imported koi from Japan. There's no shortage of relatively cheap domestic fish on the market, so why would anyone want to invest big bucks in expensive imported fish?

#### **Watch Your Customer's Eyes Pop out, and Their Resistance Fade**

The differences between the domestic varieties of koi and the Japanese koi imports are comparable to the differences between a brand new Porsche 911, and a 10-year old Ford Escort.

In other words, the difference between domestics and imports is night and day, and you won't believe the eye-popping responses you'll see from your customers when you show them your domestics first, and then guide them over to view your special imports. All of a sudden you'll have customers who are much less cost resistant, and customers who are not price shopping you against your competition.

#### **Here's the Bottom Line**

If you've decided to take the fish-retailing plunge, do it right and avoid the catastrophic mistakes that really can jeopardize your entire business if you're not careful.

Get a good supplier who you can literally bank on. Invest in a good, single tank (one filter for each tank) system. Poor water quality can cause the immune systems of your fish to become weak and expose them to otherwise harmless parasitic and bacterial problems in their environment. The old saying is, "*If you take care of the water, the fish can take care of themselves.*"

Have good testing equipment on hand, and make sure your employees know how to use them right. Hire people you can count on. And while you're doing all that, don't forget to invest in at least some of those special imported koi that will cause your customer's eyeballs to want to pop out of their sockets when they see those breathtakingly beautiful fish darting around in your tank.

If you do all these things, I promise you that you will not regret it. I suggest that 200 to 500 percent mark-ups on fish can make a big difference in the success of any water gardening retail operation, including yours. And if this sounds like the voice of experience talking here, allow me to confess that I personally spent a number of years in your boots, and I've had to make all these same decisions myself. Bottom line is, do it right and you'll win big in fish retailing ... and in water gardening too!

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