



Make a Splash with Display Ponds

By Jennifer Zuri, Marketing Communications Manager

Aquascape, Inc.

Next time you're shopping at the mall or stopping by the grocer's to pick up a loaf of bread, pay attention to consumer behavior and you'll walk out of the store with some helpful knowledge for your retail business. In a clothing store, women carefully stalk a stylish mannequin only to remark, "I never would have thought to put that outfit together, but I love it!" At the local grocery store, men will pick up a roast, rotate it in their hands to get a good look at all sides, and maybe even give it a sniff for freshness before tossing it into their cart. Most people really do need to squeeze the Charmin before making a purchase.

Your garden center is no different. Customers caress the fuzzy leaves of a lamb's ear, or fan their fingers through the soft blooms of an astilbe. No doubt they'll bend over to whiff the fragrance of a potted hyacinth. Who can resist adding these beauties to their landscape when they've had the opportunity to experience them firsthand? The same is true for water gardening, but far too often, retailers relegate pond products to the back of the store where they collect dust and remain in their faded, tired looking boxes.

The time has come to take water gardening out of the box and place it near the front of the store where it will delight and inspire your customers. Installing a display pond at your retail location allows customers the opportunity to touch and feel a water garden, much like they do with your live goods. The sound of the waterfall will attract them to the pond, and once they glimpse the fish gliding between breathtaking water lilies, they won't want to leave!

Located near the entrance of your store, a display pond announces to your community that you carry water gardening products, and conveys a message that you understand ponds and can ably assist customers with their questions. In addition, a water garden near your entrance will attract shoppers that might not otherwise stop in. Retail locations like Eagle Creek Garden Center in Chagrin Falls, Ohio understand the impact a display pond can have on water gardening sales. Eagle Creek recently installed multiple water features and have witnessed healthy growth in the sales of their pond products. In just one year, their pond product sales increased 28%, and aquatic plant sales increased 16%.

If you lack space to create a pond near your entrance, find a location within your garden center, perhaps along a pathway between greenhouses, or even inside the store. If you carry garden furniture, group seating areas near the pond to entice customers to relax by the water's edge. While they're enjoying your pond, they'll imagine experiencing that same pleasure with a similar water feature in their own backyard. Children will be drawn to the water garden too, and won't mind when Mom and Dad need to make yet another visit to your location. In fact, chances are the kids will beg Mom and Dad to come back and visit the fish.

Once you've settled on a location for your display pond, be sure to include signs informing customers that you carry pond products; otherwise they may think the pond is solely for aesthetic purposes. Eagle Creek Garden Center provides sell sheets for customers listing the products needed to create the water feature, along with the total cost of the project. Prominently displayed next to each water feature, the flyers make it easy for customers to make purchasing decisions. Most pond kits are easy to install in just one weekend, so be sure to communicate this!

(continued)

In addition to pond product information, include signs describing the aquatic plants and be sure to offer them for sale to customers. Landscape the area surrounding your display pond with ornamental shrubs if you carry them, along with seasonal annuals. Much like the fashionably adorned mannequin in the department store, you're giving customers visual ideas for their outdoor living spaces.

Some of your customers may love the idea of a water garden in their backyard, but aren't do-it-yourselfers. If you have a landscaping crew, make sure they're trained on pond installation so you can offer this service to the do-it-for-me crowd. Don't despair if you don't offer installation services, but instead consider partnering with a local contractor who can offer the service for you. Be sure to see samples of his/her work and check references.

Once you've created your beautiful display pond and have provided appropriate signs and information, your water gardening sales are sure to grow. Move your water garden products near the display pond to make pond shopping a convenience for your customers. Include water treatments, fish food, and aquatic plants in your product line and your new water gardening customers are sure to return frequently.

#

*Jennifer Zuri is Marketing Communications Manager for Aquascape, Inc.
and is author of "The Pond Builder's Guide to Break Even."
www.aquascapeinc.com*