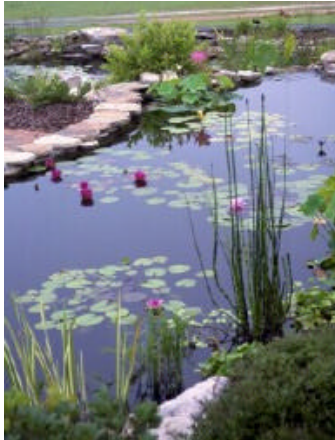


Welcome to the Water Garden – Spring Maintenance



If you are like most people, you have been hypnotized by the relaxation promised in a water garden or garden pond. You have installed the pond and made it through the winter months but now the real fun begins. You must prepare your pond for the upcoming season. Lucky for you, there is lots of advice available for setting your garden up for the spring.

Cleaning The Pond:

If you did not cover your pond then you will need to remove all of the debris that has collected in the pond over the winter. Draining and cleaning the pond will be hard work, but your pond will be healthier once this rotted and decaying material is gone and fresh water is added to the system. Next year, cover your pond for the winter with a net to keep out leaves and debris. If you had a net cover, you need to remove any debris on the cover.

Pump And Filters:

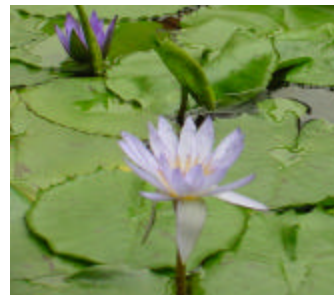
If you removed your pump and filter system for the winter, now is a good time to check and make sure all is in good working order and make repairs as necessary. Once we have passed our prolonged cold weather, you can install your system again. Due to our mild winters several pond gardeners keep their systems operational all winter long. If you kept yours in pond all winter, you still want to pull it out, clean and check the system. Make sure your pump and filter system is ready for the season.

The Fish:

If you have fish in your water garden, once the water starts to warm up they will come to the surface. Start to feed them a little, every couple of days. Remember they are most susceptible to disease this time of year because of their dormancy over the winter months, so don't over-feed. Leftover food will decay and add bacteria that could make them sick. Once the weather has consistently warmed, you might want to add more fish. If you decide to add more fish, remember to keep the new ones in a separate container for 24-48 hours to ensure you do not introduce sick or diseased fish to your pond.

What About The Plants?

Our average last date for frost in this region is April 15th, but remember that is just an average and we have had hard frosts after that date in the past. You can begin to clean up some of your hardier plants in April. Remove dead plant material and divide those that are crowded or root-bound. When you start seeing newer growth from your water lily plants you can lift them and divide them as necessary. They usually need division every 3-4 years to keep them blooming.



Once our temperatures have warmed and are consistent, you can consider adding more plants if you desire. When selecting new plants remember proper plant selection is critical. Plants soften the hard edges, add color, texture, and form to the pond, but you need to be careful with aggressive or invasive plants. Make sure you know the cultural requirements of the plant and its habit of growth. Identify if the plant needs sun or shade, what hardiness zone is best for it, does it prefer still or moving water, what is the full size of the plant, and will it give the look and feel you want for your garden. Many gardeners have been fooled by a “pretty plant” that later becomes the nuisance that will not go away. Many aggressive plants such as water hyacinth, parrot feather, and water fern are pretty, but they can cause problems by over-crowding ponds and local bodies of water. Be careful when cleaning your pond by making sure you avoid pond overflow into ditches and storm drains and most importantly, dispose of plant material properly, in some cases even if the plant looks dead, it is just dormant. Be a responsible water gardener. If you have questions concerning your water pond or need other gardening information, please give us a call at the Chesapeake Office of Virginia Cooperative Extension at 382-6348 or e-mail us at gardener@agri.city.chesapeake.va.us.