

JUST ADD Water

By Teresa McPherson

Photo courtesy of
Edward's Garden Center.

Considering dipping your toe in the water features space? Here's what you need to know.

Social distancing and increased outdoor entertaining due to covid has led to significant investment in improving home outdoor living spaces, including water feature installations. According to a study from the Freedonia Group, homeowners were inspired to add water features such as fountains, ponds and waterfalls to their outdoor areas to make them more comfortable and aesthetically pleasing.

Dennis Gentry, water garden department manager at Edward's Garden Center in Forty Fort, Pennsylvania, agrees. "Demand has grown, and I think the increase is because more people are staying at home instead of vacationing."

Demand for water features spiked in 2020 despite stagnancy in the commercial and recreation segments, according to the Freedonia Group. While the high number of units sold in the residential market in 2020 is expected to lead to a slow rate of expansion through 2025, rebounding commercial construction activity will aid gains, especially

in the office, lodging, retail, and foodservice segments, where water features will be installed as part of larger improvement efforts to entice customers to return.

A DIY Option

The Freedonia study reported that the pandemic allowed consumers to carve out more time to DIY projects, promoting sales of fountains, pond kits, and waterfall kits, which are easier to install than more elaborate projects.

Gentry says as a retail and wholesale garden center, the majority of their customers install water features themselves.

He says that in northeastern Pennsylvania, "it seems like people are getting away from ponds and are investing in pondless waterfalls and smaller water features and fountains. They can enjoy the look and sound of having a water feature with less required maintenance than a pond requires."

While demand growth for landscaping water features will be slow through 2025 as a result of the

elevated demand levels of 2020, there will still be strong interest in creating aesthetically appealing outdoor living spaces, which the pandemic intensified. In addition, the sensory appeal of water features — the sound and sight — is also driving growth.

Things to Consider

For garden centers considering a water gardening department, Gentry suggests taking the time to build water features on site "so they can see the ins and outs of constructing them and also get to know the maintenance involved in keeping them nice. This helps when selling the product.

"Having different displays on-site allows the customer to literally see and hear the water features and helps them visualize it in their yard. On-site water features definitely helps to sell product," he says.

"Water Features in Landscaping" is available from the Freedonia Group. For more information, visit www.freedoniagroup.com.

7 Aquatic Plants for Small Ponds

By David S. from Green Thumb Nursery, Southern California

Small ponds or barrel ponds are lovely additions to an outdoor space. They attract a fantastic variety of wildlife who come to drink from them. Those critters include birds, bees, and butterflies. Setting up a barrel pond or small plastic pond is not difficult. We carry an array of small pond kits that contain everything customers need to create an outdoor water feature; all they have to do is add plants. Following are a few plants that are ideal for small ponds.

EMERGENT PLANTS

Emergent plants are those that live in or out of water. They generally live near water and spend part of their days or weeks submerged or on dry land. They include:

1. Iris. True aquatic iris include red flag iris, yellow flag iris, rabbit ear iris, and blue flag iris. Iris are beautiful early bloomers that add color to ponds. They attract bees and butterflies, and other pollinators.

2. Rushes. Flowering rush (*Butomus umbellatus*) (1-5 feet) or Zebra rush (*Scirpus 'Zebrinus'*) (4-6 feet). Rushes make lovely centerpieces in water gardens. Though they are tall, they will fit into a small pond or barrel pond. These taller plants play an essential role in attracting dragonflies to a pond. The naiads use these emergent rushes to climb from the water to pupate and emerge as adults.

FLOATING LEAF PLANTS

3. Floating leaf plants include lilies, such as the fringed water lily. These can spread to 3 feet in width, but can easily be pruned. Many pollinators will use the leaves as a landing pad to drink water from the pond. Frogs will use the leaves both as a place for shade and as a roosting place while hunting.

There are a wide array of lilies for small ponds, including lotus. Some lily and lotus become massive, so be sure to make customers aware when they are shopping for floating leaf plants.

OXYGENATORS

Oxygenators are plants that put oxygen into the water, and are a must for any pond regardless of

its size. These plants keep the water healthy and prevent it from stagnating. When oxygenators are used in a small pond, pumps or filters are unnecessary because the plants help to add oxygen and remove harmful chemicals.

They include:

4. Hornwort. These submerged plants are feathery, with soft and flexible stalks. They spread like crazy, so they will require some cutting back.

5. Spiked water-milfoil is branched and similar in look to hornwort. Both can be invasive and not available, but they provide customers an excellent starting place.

MARGINAL PLANTS

These are plants that are used to getting wet. In nature, you'd find these plants along the edge of streams, lakes, and ponds. They include:

6. Pickerel rush. At 24-30 inches tall, they should be planted just above the surface or fully submerged. They can be divided if the clumps become too large.

7. Water hyacinths. These do well in shallow ponds or deeper water and offer lovely blooms and not a lot of fuss.

Green Thumb Nursery can be found online at www.greenthumb.com.

