

# Come On In, the Water's Fine

Don't just offer your customers the tools they need to build a water feature. Boost their confidence and inspire them with your garden center's own display pond.

By Paige Worthy

**T**he January issue of *Lawn & Garden Retailer* explored trends in water features for 2008. It's a trend that continues to grow as homeowners look for more ways to beautify their outdoor spaces and create an oasis for themselves on their own property.

Incorporating these products into your garden center's offerings can be a big undertaking, but in the right setting, it can make a profitable impact! So once you've added the kits, accessories and plants to your merchandise mix, what's the next step? Building a display pond at your garden center to show your customers that building an attractive water garden can be affordable at any budget — and completely within their reach.

## Ask an Expert

Jeff Rugg, a University of Illinois extension employee who taught a class last month on water gardening, also happens to be a homeowner who's been maintaining a backyard pond for more than 10 years. His long history as a "ponder" has lent itself to the expertise he now has to share on the subject.

Because water gardening involves different plants and different processes than traditional backyard landscaping, perennial flowerbeds or container gardens, he says, it may seem harder to master. But if you can establish your-

self as an expert on water gardening with the right products and a proper demonstration, customers will come to you to allay their fears about this new challenge. "The best way to sell something that's a little bit complex is to demonstrate it," he says. "It's not hard to plant a crabapple in your yard. And a water garden is not hard; it's just different. You need to instill in the customer's mind the confidence that they can do it."

## Different Strokes

First, illustrate that there are many entry levels to building a water feature. Customers can keep it simple or go all out, from a fountain or pondless waterfall to a multi-tiered backyard focal point with aquatic plants, koi and a footbridge. Rugg suggests putting together a feature for your garden center that shows the breadth of possibilities.

He recommends making the display pond an asymmetrical "blob" with a narrow area in the middle. At the smaller end, install a pump and filter system, and add some water lilies or other aquatic plants for interest. At the big end, use a larger system and install a waterfall or create an environment for koi. In the middle, divide the two sections with a bridge and landscape around the pond.

"You can take a customer with a small space or small budget to one end and show them the possibilities," Rugg says, and show the more involved half to someone with a more ambitious budget. And for the customer who has no upper price limit, step back and show them the big picture, the Cadillac of water features.

Your display pond will not only highlight the potential features in a customer's future water garden; it will also create another attraction at your garden center that could draw traffic and invite bigger sales as the spring season kicks into high gear. 🌿

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A display pond at your garden center can inspire customers and drive sales. (Photo: Aquascape Inc.)

## Water feature pump

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