

FRESHEN UP A TIRED LAWN

In a time when homeowners are downsizing and looking to save money, small backyard water features can offer a splash of innovation — and a big boost to your sales.

BY JENNIFER ZURI

Years ago, if you wanted a backyard pond, it meant taking a trip to the hardware store for a plastic, preformed pond that didn't allow for much landscaping creativity. Or worse yet, it meant digging a hole, slapping some liner in the bottom and filling it with water. Oh, maybe you'd toss a plant or two around the edge, but you'd be horrified months later to find a couple of inches of ugly, messy sludge at the bottom. Not a very pretty sight.

Fortunately, today's ponds have come a long way, and it's now relatively easy to create a beautiful, relaxing ecosystem pond that takes little time to maintain, meaning more hours of leisurely enjoyment for family and friends. When asked what they would change about their pond, the majority of water gardeners will say, "I wish it were bigger!" Although an 11x16 pond with a stream or waterfall is the norm for most homeowners,

the industry is starting to see a change in this trend. With the economy perched precariously in hopes of an upturn in the housing industry, homeowners are opting for smaller water features.

Creating a Backyard Paradise

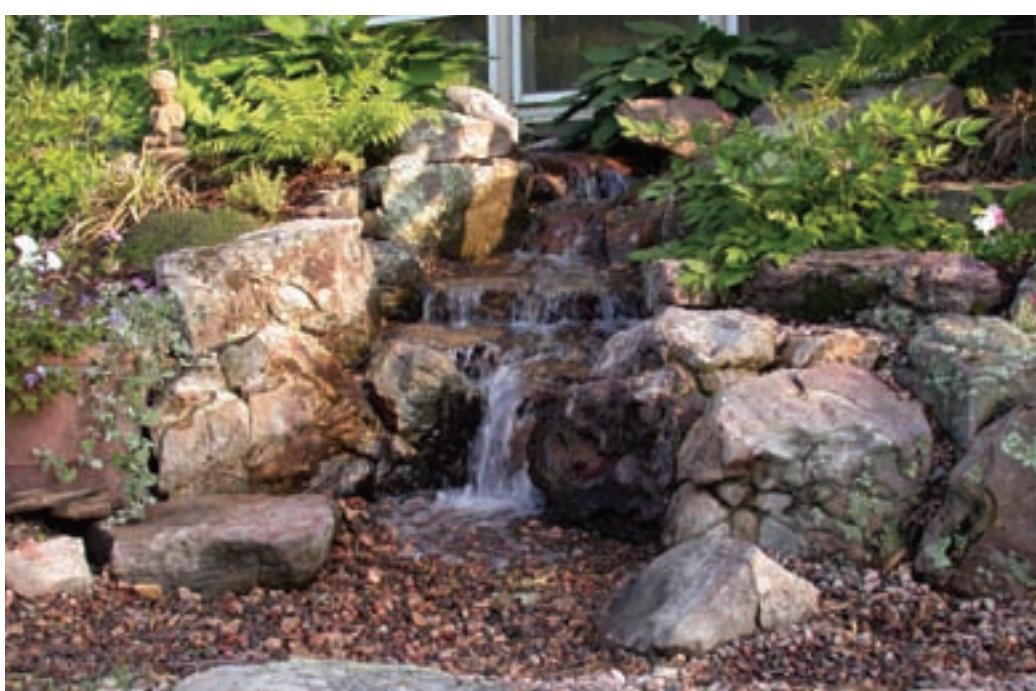
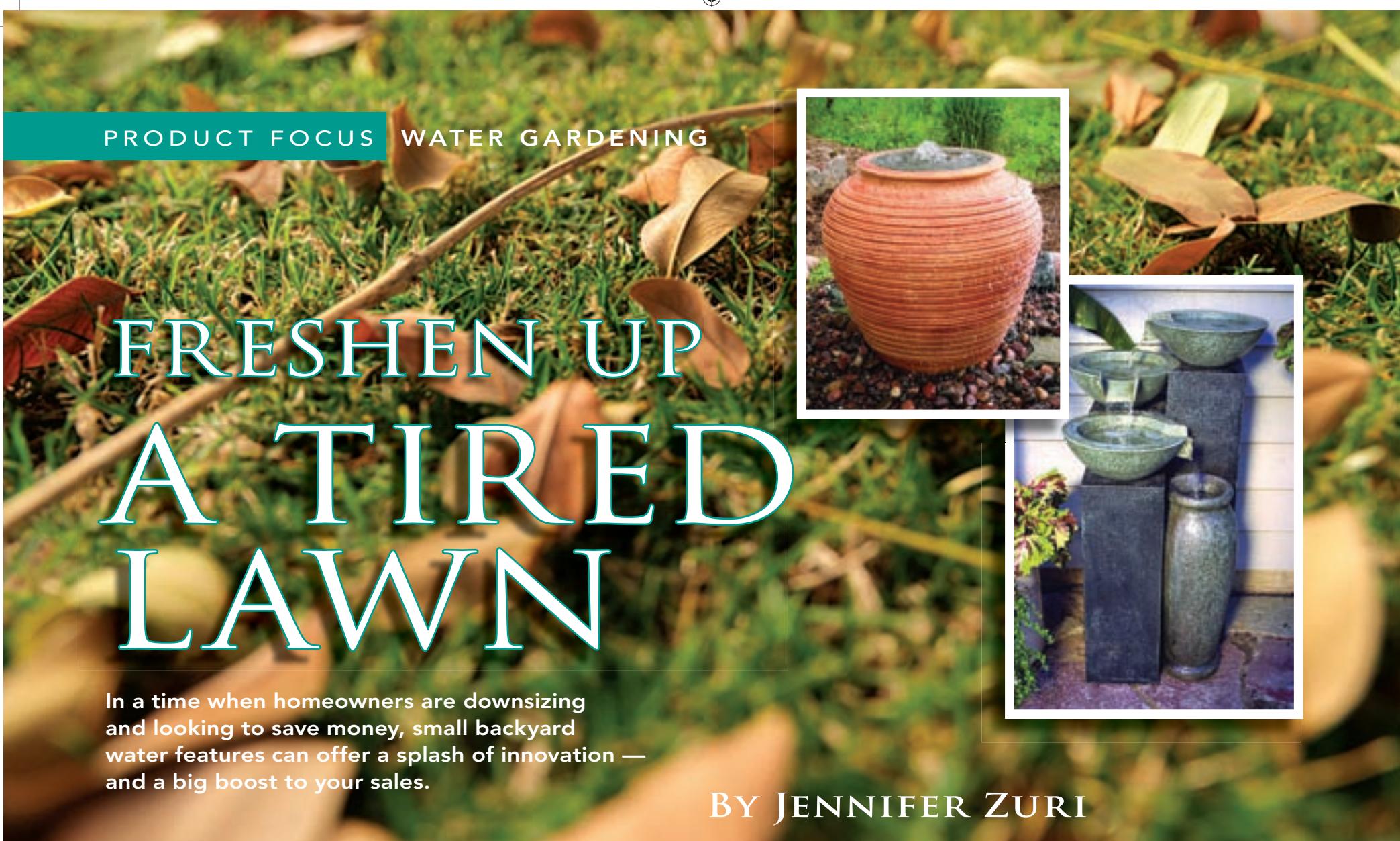
Water gardening will remain a strong trend for many years. Although consumers will cut back on luxuries such as travel because of the high cost of fuel, they won't mind investing a bit to create "vacation" spaces in their yards that will eventually provide a greater return when they're ready to relocate or upgrade to a larger home. According to a new study by the National Association of Realtors, "Nearly 20 percent of buyers say they consider landscaping to be a 'very important' factor in their decision to buy a house." Because the housing slump is making it difficult to upgrade living spaces by moving to a larger or more luxurious property, a greater number of homeowners are improving their current residences to make them more enjoyable until the market improves and they can move on to greener pastures.

Ecosystem ponds in particular are popular because they not only enhance the owner's outdoor living space, but they create habitat areas that are environmentally friendly. Chemical use is kept to a minimum, and water clarity is enhanced by maintaining a proper balance between fish, plants, filtration and aeration. An ecosystem pond is a sustainable habitat that benefits both the surrounding environment and wildlife. While the initial filling of the pond may require several gallons of water, the space of a pond requires less watering in the long run than the same expanse of lawn. A water garden needs to be topped off just once in awhile, whereas grass needs to be watered regularly to keep it from turning brown. Homeowners realize that an ecosystem pond is much easier on the eyes than a tired-looking lawn.

Pondless waterfalls continue to rise in popularity among homeowners because they fit in small spaces while providing the sight and sound of running water in the garden. People with small children often opt for a pondless feature because there's no area of deep water to worry about. As the children grow older, a pond can easily be added. These features still allow the homeowner to grow marginal aquatic and bog plants, adding variety to their garden's palette.

Sometimes Less Is More

The most rapidly emerging trend in the water gardening industry today is the diverse array of smaller water features sometimes known as "foun-



Top: Smaller-scale "fountainscapes" are becoming more popular with consumers as they downsize their homes or attempt to save more money. These decorative items don't use much water but are still attractive and add the soothing sound of water to the garden. **Bottom:** Pondless waterfalls are perfect for customers with small children or pets, as there's no risk of them to fall into the pond while left unsupervised. Later, it's relatively simple to add a pond to the feature. (Photos: Aquascape, Inc.)

tainscapes" or "ornamental water." Decorative fountains sit atop a basin or reservoir that holds several gallons of water. A pump is housed in the basin that pushes water up through the decorative feature. For a fraction of the cost of a full-fledged ecosystem pond, the consumer can enjoy running water in the landscape. These decorative pieces can also be tucked into several locations, allowing garden visitors to wind through the landscape and stop to visit these treasures along their journey.

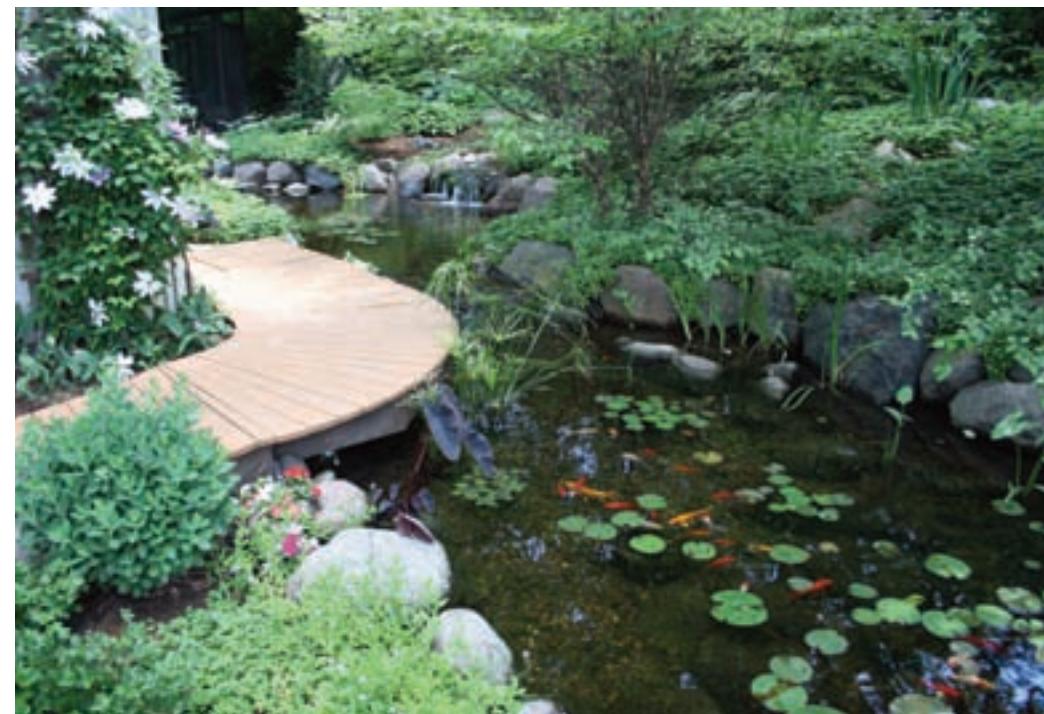
Decorative fountains are now available in all shapes and sizes, and some manufacturers offer a wide selection of price points, colors and materials. From elegant brass to economical resin, fountains provide refreshing interest throughout the landscape. A contractor can install a decorative fountain with a basin or reservoir in approximately two hours. Homeowners can also install their own fountainscapes as a simple weekend project. Many retailers are catching on to the popularity of water in the garden and are adding the basins and decorative pieces to their product lines.

Fountainscapes allow consumers to infuse their personality into their landscape. The design elements of decorative fountains range from Asian-inspired pieces to rustic country or modern vogue elements. There really isn't much limitation to what homeowners can use to get water flowing on their property. Claw-foot tubs can be rigged to overflow into a basin, and oversized urns can have holes drilled in the bottom to allow tubing to run from the pump up through the vessel. As long as the interior is waterproofed to avoid leakage, the consumer can put good use to garden vessels that have been hiding in the shed.

Get Your Feet Wet

It's no surprise that water gardening trends are reflecting economic conditions as well as the desire for eco-friendly outdoor living spaces. An expanse of green lawn is no longer a requirement for water gardening: Even condo and apartment dwellers can add ornamental water to their balcony or patio with a standalone fountain or container water garden.

More consumers are getting their feet wet with smaller water features. As they become more comfortable with the hobby, they're upgrading to ecosystem ponds, whether large or small. Even after the housing market takes an upturn — as it eventually will — smaller water features will remain popular. It's not unusual for a homeowner to have water features



An ecosystem pond, when done properly, can be a low-maintenance, beautiful asset to the home. Filling a pond once and topping off for maintenance actually uses less water in the long run than a similarly sized expanse of grass.

in both the front and backyards. The soothing sight and sound of water in the garden can become somewhat addictive once a homeowner takes the plunge. ☑

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Fish merchandiser

This fish retailing system is intended to house large quantities of fish and can be disassembled if necessary. It comes with a biological filtration system, a UV light, a pump and plumbing accessories needed for assembly. Aquatic Gardens & Koi Co., Inc. (609) 261-8700. **Write in 1406**

Floating skimmer

The SwimSkim floating skimmer is designed for use in any pond. It removes surface leaves and dust, and functions as a bio-filter and air injector in a single device. SwimSkim contains an 800-gph pump with a 15-foot cord. A two-year limited warranty and four-color retail packaging are available. Dickson Brothers. (800) 475-7867. **Write in 1407**



Pond management products

This new pond maintenance program includes GC Blue Colorant, GC Liquid Bacteria and GC Water Soluble Packets. Colorant aims to offer a natural blue look for larger ponds and lakes. Liquid bacteria is a concentrated microbial for reducing ammonia, nitrates and excess nutrients that affect water quality and clarity. Packets are designed to metabolize excess nitrogen and phosphorous in ponds and lakes. BioSafe Systems. (888) 273-3088. **Write in 1408**



Fountain kit

Waterspout and pump kits are available in many styles and sizes to fit different containers. Some styles are designed to be good in shallow vessels, while others are better suited for deeper containers. Bamboo Accents. (415) 454-6260. **Write in 1409**

Water garden planter

The Thermoplanter is intended to extend the growing season for tropical water lilies and provide easy wintering. It measures 12 inches in diameter and 9 3/4 inches high. Discount Pond Supplies. (800) 979-0999. **Write in 1410** ☑

