

Container Water Gardens: Perfect For Any Space



Water gardening is not just about a big pond in the back yard. It can come in many different shapes, sizes, colors and even containers.

By Kelly Clancy

What's holding your customers back from digging a hole and adding a perfectly peaceful aquatic paradise to their back yards? Is it the price? Size? The uncertainty of it all? Will homeowners even like adding water gardening to their list of outdoor hobbies? How do your customers make a transition into the wet and wild world of water gardening? The answer may lie in container water gardens.

The Perfect Fit

For people with small back yards or a simple porch, sometimes a container garden is the only way to get a water garden fix. For some, it can lead to the dream of a big yard and a bigger water garden. Luckily, there are several types of small water gardens available to potential water gardeners.

"A tub garden or container water garden is only limited by the actual container you can find, as long as it holds water," Ed Beaulieu, Aquascape Designs' vice president of field research, said. "I've seen some unique setups using bathtubs or even a boat sealed up and planted with aquatics."

Do It Yourself

We're not suggesting anyone drag a bathtub out to the yard, but there are many different containers that can work in the garden. Pails, terra cotta pots, whiskey barrels and urns can be used as long as they're treated with a sealant or have some kind of liner keeping the water in place and, of course, no holes! The bigger, the better — anything that will hold water.

Pick the container, check for holes, put a liner or sealant in it and make sure both are fish and plant safe. Next, put the container in a safe spot

outside. Fill it with water, making sure to dechlorinate it, so plants and fish will be healthy.

Buy It

If your customers aren't the handy types, there are several types of container water gardens on the market today. The mainstream is a whiskey barrel and liner tub consumers can get as a kit from virtually any type of garden center. Some of these come with pumps, fountains, tubing and hardware, and installation is a snap.

Planting Your Feet

Plants can turn any boring container water garden into a work of art. Customers will want to go with water plants they like and are pleasing to the eye. "A container garden can be nothing more than a giant planter for lotus, which has an awesome look," said Beaulieu.

If the water garden hobbyist is a beginner and just wants to get his or her hands dirty with plants, suggest a more simple approach to the customer. "Depending on size, a small, pygmy water lily might be the best bet, although some people will still use a regular water lily," Beaulieu suggested. "Mix it up with marginals and a floating plant or two. This simple combo can easily fill up the entirety of a whiskey barrel-type container garden."

Fishing For Answers

Will homeowners be able to add fish like in a regular water garden? It really depends on the water volume of the container. A 20-gal. container is going to go through extreme temperature fluctuations — cooling and heating with night and day.

"A goldfish in a heavily planted container water garden can suffice as the plants shade 90 percent



Above: For those without a lot of space, a container garden may be their only option for enjoying a water garden at home. **Left:** Pails, terra cotta pots, whiskey barrels, urns and more can be used as water gardens — as long as they are treated with a sealant or have a liner. (Photos: Aquascape Designs)

Fountain kit

Waterspout and pump kits are available in many styles and sizes to fit different containers, big or small. Some styles are good on shallow vessels, while others are better suited to deeper containers. Bamboo Accents. (415) 454-6260. **Write in 1403**



Pond water treatment

CW Real Clear pond products are intended for use during colder months. The cold water formula is manufactured with beneficial aerobic and anaerobic bacteria designed to function down to 40° F. Aquatic BioScience. (800) 734-0207. **Write in 1401**



Pump

RoughNeck pumps are designed to be quiet, energy efficient and easy to install. The air-cooled heat sink is durable and may allow the pump to run dry without damage to the shaft seal. Roughneck is suitable for fresh and salt-water applications. Dickson Brothers, Inc. (800) 475-7867. **Write in 1407**



of the surface area and keep the tub cooler,” Beaulieu said. “A 1-ft. koi might look a little funny in 15-20 gals. of water.”

Beaulieu suggests throwing gambusia (mosquito fish) into the container water garden, because they can tolerate warm water well. Small fantails would also be a good fit for the water garden, and if you happen to have a larger container, you can even consider a comet or shubunkin.

What About Mosquitoes?

While many container gardens do just fine without a filter or fountain, it’s always best to have some circulation in place. A small pump may be attached to a small fountainhead or may simply sit at the bottom, shooting a stream of water vertically to give a gentle turbulence at the surface. A sponge pre-filter or even an aquarium bubbler may also do the trick to keep your water moving.

Be sure to steer clear of still water because of the risk of mosquitoes. If some kind of agitation exists in the water, there will usually be less, if any, mosquito larvae hanging around the container garden. Hobbyists should also check with the local municipality to see if fines can be issued for having standing or still water on the property. With the threat of the West Nile virus being so prevalent these last couple of years, it’s worth it to be educated. However, fish in the container water garden would take care of any larvae that hatch there.

General Maintenance

When it comes to container water gardens, maintenance is as easy or as hard as you want to make it. “Many of the small containers are small enough that you may use a garden hose to top it off,” Beaulieu said. “And if there are no fish, you may use it to overflow the system for severe cleaning.”

Hobbyists may not need to clean their container gardens, but if debris does accumulate, they can use enzyme-based products. Enzymes quickly reduce the amount of sludge build-up and are gentle on aquatic life.

Remind your customers to keep an eye on the container garden to watch for evaporation, especially in warmer climates with high temperatures. Plus, warm water can be as detrimental to fish as freezing water. If you’re in an area that is prone to heavy rainfall, keep watch for overflowing.

To keep the container water garden system healthy, beneficial bacteria can be added, although it isn’t necessary. If algae ever take a hold of the garden, a flocculent can also be used safely. Chemicals can harm fish and plants and deter other wildlife from visiting the container aquatic garden.

What If They Already Have One?

You can never have too many water gardens. Water gardeners everywhere use container gardens to add a little more to their decks or patios and to help them learn about new plants. Container gardens are also a great way to teach kids about nature and can be a great starter pond for young children interested in water. Prices for container water gardens are reasonable, and they can be a great pond learning experience for all ages! 🌿

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Water lily

‘Colorado’ is a free-flowering water lily, and it is bred to have more than one bloom open at once. The blooms stand 4-6 inches above the water. The new leaves are slightly mottled and should spread 4- to 6-ft. across the pond. ‘Colorado’ has a long blooming season and was bred to flower in partial shade. Lily Blooms. (800) 921-0005. **Write in 1414** ▶



Fountain

The new Jackson Fountain is sized for a patio or small garden and measures 21 inches in diameter and stands 40 inches tall. It is available in 18 different concrete finishes. The fountain includes a pump, tubing and setup instructions. Brookfield Co. (706) 375-8530. **Write in 1406**

Fish food

The variety mix feeds koi and pond fish and is intended to not cloud water. These floating pellets and sticks are made of a blend of fruits, greens, carbohydrates, protein, wheat germ and vitamins. Ecological Laboratories. (239) 573-0637. **Write in 1409**

