

Watery Wonders



An exterior display pond sets your location apart from the competition and helps boost foot traffic through your garden center. (Photos: Aquascape Designs)

With all of the product categories you can add to your garden center, why choose ponds?

By Doug Duval

You've read about it, heard about it on the radio and even seen your competitors take a stab at it...the water garden category. In your eyes, however, it can equal a big headache. For the past several years, water gardening has been an up-and-down trend. It goes really great for a while, then it tends to slow down, then it suddenly spikes again. You have friends who have had slime-infested concrete ponds, and you are in no hurry to sell that lifestyle to your trusting and loyal customers.

But, when was the last time you took a look at ponds, a really good look? Ponds have come a long way since the early '90s, and concrete versions are almost unheard of these days. That's right, it may be time to take a new look at ponds.

Why Are They Popular?

The bottom line is water features encompass a category that cannot be ignored by retailers — there's just too much opportunity out there. What should be explained from the beginning is that ponds come in all shapes and sizes. You may have a customer who wants a large pond, but most consumers are into smaller, backyard ponds. The small, backyard pond lures people in because it still allows for green grass and beautiful gardens while adding the prospect of water.

The Display Pond

It is important to remember that consumers do not really know how good a pond can look without seeing one. Perhaps a neighbor has one that looks

great, and your customer would like something similar. Then there is the customer who thinks their neighbor's pond looks good, but from the photos, you know that a better one can be built. How do you educate people on the wonders of water gardening and how great a pond really can look? That is where a display pond comes in.

What could be better than a water garden inviting customers into your store? How about a water garden filled with aquatic plants, stocked with koi and surrounded by ornamental grasses, perennials and even a bench for people to sit and stay a while? Having a display pond may not only sell your water garden category but also keep your customers coming back to see how you have planted it each year.

If you already have a water garden department and do not have a display pond, think about installing one. You and your employees will be so much more educated on the subject of ponds if you have one to take care of yourselves. You are the expert if your display pond looks great!

Getting The Sale

When it comes to selling ponds, it's easy to say the product sells itself, but is that really true? Customers are visual, which is why end caps have to be perfect and large displays have to be appealing. You may want to consider hosting a Build-A-Pond Day seminar. Grab a

few staff members, sign up some customers and build a pond together either at your location or a local venue with high traffic.

Once people are bit by the water gardening bug and have put their hearts

Ten Tips For Building Waterfalls

"The waterfall is important for both form and function," explained Greg Wittstock, founder and president of Aquascape Designs, Inc. In man-made water gardens, water is pumped over the waterfall where gravity returns it to the pond, which keeps the pond moving and cool.

"In a properly constructed waterfall," said Wittstock, "the water also passes through the waterfall's biological filters where it picks up beneficial bacteria. This helps keep a water garden in ecological balance."

The following are some of Wittstock's tips for building waterfalls:

- Make your waterfall fit in with the surrounding area.
- The size of the stone should be proportional to the drop of the waterfall.
- Use larger rocks to frame the waterfall.
- Fewer rocks are better.
- Add twists and turns.
- Place the waterfall where it can be seen from indoors.
- There are no ugly waterfalls.
- Use a bio-filter unit as a base.
- Soften the edges with plants.
- Imitate nature.

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and souls into the pond, maybe they will be ready for building their own pond creations. The end result is a display pond either at your location or a high-profile location for you to show other customers.

Want To Sell Other Products?

Customers may come in to buy a pond kit, but they rarely leave with just a kit. And if they do, they will typically be back for more. A pond is not complete without plants to surround it and float in it, koi to visit and feed everyday, a patio to view the pond from and of course, patio furniture to sit on. The options go on and on, and you would be hard-pressed to find a category that has that type of effect on the rest of your garden center sales.

Now those are all things that could very easily be tracked by your computer system, but what cannot be tracked is the happiness that your loyal customers receive knowing you were a part of the transformation in their yards.

Customers that spend more time in their backyards want to beautify them even more. It's not enough to have a patio set; now they want Adirondack chairs seated in front of the waterfall so they can get up close and personal with their ponds. You can see now why water features are so popular in the hectic society we live in today. It is a break from the everyday, right in the backyard.

Jump In

So whether you have been considering adding water gardening to your product mix or have already taken the plunge, remember, the hobby will continue to grow for years to come. The market is far from being saturated, so opportunity lies around every corner for those willing to sign on with water gardening. Everyone wants a pond; they just don't know it yet. Help your customers find their perfect ponds in your store.

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