

# Your **Bubbly** Customers

Your community could be swimming with potential water gardening business — and a little shared passion could be all it takes to fish it out!

By Gay Schneider

**W**ho knew that when I opened that yellow flyer, I would be holding in my hands the very thing I had been wanting for three long years?

Let me back up and say I am an avid ponder. As a beginner, four seasons ago, I bought supplies I didn't need and put a lot of products into my pond that weren't necessary. The following three seasons, I have studied the natural pond environment and developed a plan to keep my waterscape clean, sparkling and balanced with minimal interference. I have learned about the seasonal cycles and the natural reasons for the occasional algae bloom that always coincides with nature's need for it, like in the spring when the tadpoles are born in it and use it for nutrition as they grow. Take out that algae and you disturb the natural order. If you want critters in your pond, keep it natural. My pond builder left a beautiful pond but no practical care information. So I decided to learn how to care for my pond myself. Many people are waiting for someone to help them learn. They don't know what's needed or where to go for solutions to their problems. They don't even know what the end result should be. All they know

is that it should look something like the pond they saw at the Flower, Lawn & Garden Show last winter.

It has been my belief for the last three years that the sensible place to go for information, plants, fish and pond-building supplies would be our local garden center. Most consumers have a long history with their favorite garden store and trust their advice and products. I find it odd to have to go elsewhere for my pond needs.

With that in mind, I spoke to the owner of one of our independent centers a couple of years ago when I was on a mission to identify all of the "land" plants that would flourish in a water environment. I offered to put a little water drop on each plant tag that I had successfully maintained in my water garden. This was not only for the benefit of the pond owner, whose numbers have dramatically increased

in our area, but it would increase revenue for the garden center. They even already had a little waterfall that could serve as a focal point for this new area. Unfortunately, my suggestions were met with no interest at all, in my free service or in carrying pond-care products and the new business it could generate. I was quite disappointed.

Fast forward to fall 2008 and the bright yellow flyer, advertising that one of the oldest and most respected garden stores in Topeka, Kan., would now carry pond supplies! It took me a minute to grasp the fact that I was seeing the beginnings of my dream coming true — around the same time I was asked to write this article describing how garden centers could meet the needs of water gardeners! Perfect.

I went right to the source and on a beautiful fall Sunday, I met with Dave Jackson of Jackson's Greenhouse. A family-owned and operated business, Jackson's has been a staple in our Kansas community since 1951. Dave grew up in the business and, after graduating from Kansas State University, returned to help his father run the business, finally taking over management when his father retired.



Dave Jackson of Jackson's Greenhouse in Topeka, Kan., has recently dived into the water gardening market.

Dave showed me around the grounds, pointing with enthusiasm, arms outstretched, to try and help me see his vision: where the pond would be, his supply of landscape rocks, his fish tanks. He was showing me what it could be come spring.

After the tour I was sitting in Dave's cluttered office, knowing that I had found someone who understood. Dave is putting in a large pond, and Jackson's will carry pond plants and supplies, landscape rocks, fish and other pond needs. Dave's enthusiasm matched mine as I saw my dream playing out before my eyes. Someone else realized the need for this intertwining of environments. Dave listened and looked at my pictures, the impatiens growing wildly in the waterfall and the ajuga doing quite nicely as a marginal. He just grinned. We have the beginning of something big in our town, and Dave Jackson is leading the way. Even in uncertain financial times, Dave knows he is doing the right thing. He told me many people are doing "staycations" these days. Staying at home by the pond: Who needs more? 🐟

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