

Creative water gardens for the yard

By Daniel Casciato

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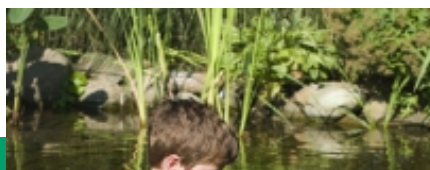
As spring blossoms back into our yards, many of us are starting to spruce up our surroundings with colorful flowerbeds and fragrant rose bushes. Some gardeners are taking it a step further by adding water gardens or ponds as a creative alternative for their landscape.

"Water gardens and ponds are growing in popularity," said Kevin Soergel, owner of K. P. Soergel and Associates, Inc., a landscape design business in Pine Township. "They're fun, easy to install, and low maintenance. You're creating your own little oasis and it becomes a vacation that lasts all year long."

According to Soergel, a water garden usually consists of one or more ponds connected by one or multiple waterfalls and/or streams. The reasons why someone would want water features in the yard are as diverse as the possibilities that come with water gardening, Soergel said. For some it's aesthetics, for others it can bring serenity into your surroundings or provide an escape from suburbia or an urban workplace.

"Water is a basic human need," said Soergel. "We're all drawn to water, whether it's at the beach, a pond, or a lake in the woods. Water is attractive, soothing and calming. It brings tranquility to any life."

Water garden or pond location, size and type are the first things to consider. Proper construction and water quality also are important considerations as are fish and



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aquatic plant selection. Sunlight is needed for plant photosynthesis. Plants produce oxygen, remove and recycle nutrients and provide shade and hiding places for fish and other inhabitants.



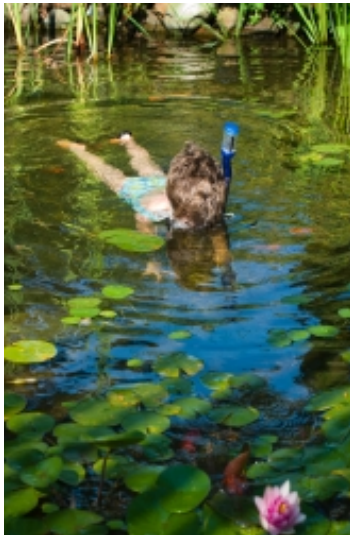
"It becomes an entire ecosystem that takes care of itself," said Soergel.

As for the location of your water garden or pond, Rob Faulkner of Keystone Aquatics in Mars says that, "you might want to consider locating the water garden so that it can be viewed from the house and enjoyed even when not outdoors. Water gardens are no longer just a luxury for glamorous resorts and extravagant locales. The popularity of water effects in back yards and businesses has grown tremendously."

A water garden or pond is not for everyone. But through creative landscaping, homeowners are discovering other unique ways to make their yards aesthetically-pleasing and more relaxing.

"We receive all sorts of requests," said Phillip Wain, owner of Wain Landscaping, a full-service landscaping company in Butler. "Right now, landscape lighting seems to be popular. There are many things you can do with lighting. Homeowners are using lights to highlight certain plants in their yards, water features, ornamental trees and even their walkway."

Although many homeowners prefer to work on their yard on their own, some will want to hire a landscape designer. When selecting one to help you with your landscape or "aquascape," there are a few simple but important points that you have to consider.



Make an outline of your idea. Decide on the things that you want in the landscape like waterfalls, vines, trees, colors, etc.

"Before you start looking for a landscaper, try to have at least an idea of what you want," advised Wain. "A good landscape designer will give you what you want, but it helps if you can guide them."

Get a referral. Search online or better yet, ask your friends and relatives for referrals. "When you're looking for a landscaper, it's always best to get referrals," said Wain.

Meet with your prospects face-to-face. Tell them about your ideas and how they could help you. "Our intention is to inquire about a client's ideas and visions and to design a solution to meet those

objectives by combining the client's concept with the specific requirements of the desired aquatic environment," stated Faulkner.

Ensure the firm is authorized to do the work. Make sure that the landscaper has a valid license, certifications, etc. Always check for their federal identification number.

Ask for a portfolio. This gives you a good idea about the work of the company and what the company is really capable of delivering. Soergel said that he always shows potential clients his portfolio.

“Sometimes, I take them on a field trip to see similar work,” said Soergel. “It’s best to see their work firsthand.”

Get assurances regarding maintenance. While choosing a landscaping firm, it is very important to ensure that they will provide the required timely maintenance.

Insist on a legally valid agreement. Once you have selected your landscaper, make sure that you ask for a legally binding agreement that contains each and every aspect of the contract. The contract has to be signed by both parties and should contain details regarding proposed design and materials to be used, terms of payment, duration of work, maintenance, guarantees, total cost involved, starting and finishing of work.

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