

It's time to winterize your backyard ponds

BY MARTY FIGLEY
SPECIAL WRITER

The popularity of water ponds has been increasing for a number of years as more people realize the satisfaction and serenity that water gardening provides.

The benefits of a water garden are many: additional and different wildlife, mosquitoes are virtually non-existent, the sound of moving water from a fountain or cascading down rocks, and the beauty of the many water plants that are available.

Cindy Carlton, field trip coordinator of Grass Roots Nursery, 24765 Bell Road, New Boston, and Eric Jackson, its nursery specialist, told me the proper steps of winterizing water ponds.

Ponds 30 inches or more deep can successfully be over wintered, Jackson says. Pond heaters are available for those with a depth of between 18 and 30 inches. As part of their nursery service, classes on this subject will take place 10:30 a.m. Saturdays, Oct. 14 and Nov. 11, and Sundays, Oct. 22 and 29 and Nov. 5. For more information, call (313) 753-9200.

Feeding the fish is part of the joy of pond gardening and during the summer they need regular fish food. Beginning in September that food needs to be given alternately with a special fall food, and beginning in October just the fall food is sufficient.

The fish will indicate when they have had enough food before going into a resting period — a semi-hibernation for the winter. They will find enough food in the water to sustain themselves during that time.

It's not necessary to do anything about the other pond critters such as tadpoles, frogs and snails, which will bury themselves in the soil in plant pots or in folds of the pond liner if it is flexible. For shallower ponds a dishpan full of sand in the bottom of the pond will provide a bed for the critters.

A net draped over the pond, teepee



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Pond-oring: Water ponds can be winterized so their own brand of beauty and peacefulness will return in warmer weather.

fashion, and secured securely at the sides will keep falling leaves out of the water.

It is very important to remove as much as possible of the foliage and other organic matter that does get in the water because it will produce gasses that will injure the pond life. This is best done after the first frost when the foliage is dead. Use a pond vacuum that runs off a garden hose to clean the area well.

Keep the pump running during this time.

When ice starts to form on the pond and begins creeping from the edges, remove the pump. If the filter is inside the pond, it can be removed now or left as it is, in shallower ponds. For deeper ponds, remove the filter from the pond and drain the system to winterize it. Store the pump in a bucket of water to keep the seals wet so they won't dry out. The principle is the same as a wine cork.

Bubbles are very important to the critters in all ponds to provide air into the water. Gary Bates, owner of Grass Roots Nursery, has designed a bottle bubbler, an unusual way to provide this most important air. It is available at the nursery.

As soon as the ice is off the pond, vacuum the pond as was done in the fall and remove any additional organic material from the water. Rehook the pump. They set the pump inside a special biological filter material rather than using chemicals, Jackson says. Exchange one-third of the existing water with fresh at this time.

Shelves that hold water plants can be moved up to their regular spot and plants can be put in. Fertilize the plants with a suitable fertilizer formulated especially for pond plants, as the directions indicate. Continue to fertilize every month during the season. Some plants have special requirements and these need to be addressed.

When the fish become active again, it is time to start feeding them, using a medicated fish food (their spring tonic — preventive medicine), then as the season progresses they need their regular diet.

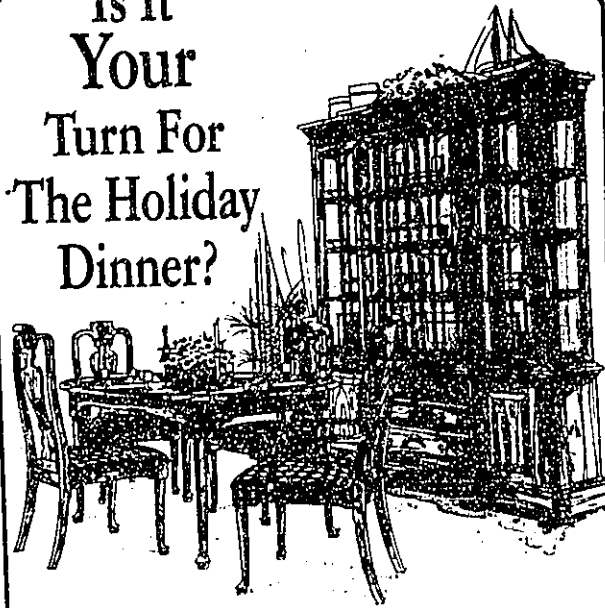
Grass Roots Nursery provides storage for water plants for the winter for those people who don't have the proper facilities.

"It's really simple (to winterize a pond); make sure your air pump is running!" Jackson said.

He also suggests that first-time water gardeners use flexible liners because the size of a pond can readily be increased. When people get the "bug" most want larger ponds than they start with.

After a cold winter season, pond owners can look forward to the pleasure that water ponds provide. Soon this special garden feature will be back in all its glory, flowers will bloom, fish will entertain and the pond will again offer its own brand of beauty and peacefulness.

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