

Music of Water – Features for Your Garden

By Valerie Jean Rose
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There is the old pond!
Lo, into it jumps a frog:
Hark, water's music!

---Basho, translated from the Japanese by John Bryan

A shimmering fountain, placid pond or well-tended birdbath can bring water's music into your landscape. Delightful creatures are drawn to water, from dragonflies to hummingbirds, and of course, frogs. A well-planned water feature adds new texture to a garden, opening up a new world of plants that flourish only in wet or boggy settings.

"A water feature can be as simple as a lily in a tub on a deck; or something as grandiose as the waterfalls at the Tulalip Casino," says northwest landscaper Gary Zweifel. A sturdy porch or patio can accommodate a unique water element by itself, or can be grouped with potted plants, statues or other garden art.

Zweifel adds, "Water features can be created in different kinds of containers, including jars, decorative pots, milk bottles and watering cans. Even old bathtubs and livestock watering tanks can be repurposed into above-ground ponds."

Use a hose or rope to outline locations when placing a pond. "A level area that gets at least six hours of sunlight per day is ideal," says Teri Dunn, author of *Water Gardening for the Northwest*. This is especially important for growing showy plants like water lilies. However, smaller fish ponds should have at least some shady areas. Dunn cautions, "Hot water is stressful for some plants and fish."

A tiny pond could be placed next to water-loving plants like a dwarf dappled Japanese willow or alder. Choose plants carefully as many species will not welcome standing water close by.

Large roots can pierce pond liners, and, Dunn adds, "Trees will drop leaves, twigs, and perhaps seeds or fruit, which you will need to keep removing from the water."

To enjoy the wildlife visiting your water, choose a location you can easily see from a window or favorite seat. Avoid unhappy encounters with underground utilities, by calling 811 before you dig your pond.



Water flows down this small water feature surrounded by pots, plants and a tentative crane. *Photo by Trish Varrelman / WSU Skagit County Master Gardener.*

If you plan to include a pump, fountain or lighting, find a safe route to bury an electrical line to the nearest building or outlet. Solar-powered pumps can be an option for smaller installations.

To retain its shape, and water, a pond is usually lined. For a wildlife-friendly pond, a polyvinyl chloride or PVC liner is best, according to Stephanie Lamb and Nancy Allen in the Oregon State University bulletin, “Create a Garden Pond for Wildlife.” PVC is flexible and durable, while a concrete liner is more expensive and difficult to maintain.

Concrete must be leached before you can introduce fish and plants, and is not recommended for a wildlife pond. A prefabricated polyethylene shell comes with built-in shelves for placing potted water plants in their desired depths. But their slopes can be steep and slippery, and not good for wildlife that need safe access into and out of the water.

Place rocks and stones around the edge of the ponds for a naturalistic appearance, and to protect the liner from damage by the sun’s ultraviolet light. Sandstone, slate and granite are excellent choices for edging. Avoid limestone that can leach into the water and harm wildlife.



A bubbling fountain and a birdbath give the feathered friends a long, cool drink on a hot summer day. *Photo by Trish Varrelman / WSU Skagit County Master Gardeners.*

On a more modest scale, a birdbath also attracts wildlife, primarily birds, butterflies, dragonflies and other insects. To prevent your birdbath from becoming a cat feeder, locate it away from shrubbery, where cats can hide and pounce.

Because birds cannot easily perch on slippery surfaces, avoid baths made of glazed pottery or smooth plastic. Concrete or terra cotta materials are easier for bird claws to grip. Create a perch by placing a rough stone in the birdbath, keeping part of the rock above the waterline.

If you had to drink your bath water, you would want it to be fresh and served in a clean tub. The Audubon Society Website recommends cleaning bird baths and feeders daily, and disinfecting monthly. Brushing or wiping the bowl, and changing water every day will eliminate mosquito larvae and many other undesirables. Once a month, immerse the birdbath in a solution of nine parts water to one part bleach. Rinse thoroughly and refill with fresh water.

Adding a water feature to your garden gives you an opportunity to add new plants. For a pond or container, landscaper Zweifel says, “Plants that grow directly in water include

hardy lilies, water hyacinths, water hawthorn, mini-cattails and irises.” The boggy edges of the pond are a good place for bulrushes, great water plantain, wool grass and spike rush.

If you choose a water feature that fits your landscape, along with the right plants, you can enjoy water’s music this summer and throughout the coming seasons.

RIGHT:

A single bowl filled with water in a veggie garden provides hydration for beneficial birds and insects. *Photo by Trish Varrelman / WSU Skagit County Master Gardener.*



RESOURCES:

- Basho, Matsuo. “The Old Pond.”
- http://www.poetryconnection.net/poets/Matsuo_Basho/3423
- Zweifel, Gary. Landscaper. (360) 708-4566.
- Dunn, Teri. *Water Gardening for the Northwest*. Cool Springs Press, 2006
- Lamb, Stephanie and Allen, Nancy. “Create a Garden Pond For Wildlife.” Oregon State University bulletin. Published January 2002, reviewed July 2013.
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/4hwildlifestewards/pdfs/pond.pdf>
- Ibid. “illustration: cutaway diagram of a pond w/wildlife-friendly features.”
<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/4hwildlifestewards/pdfs/pond.pdf> p.5, figure 2.
- Audubon Society website. “Feeder Maintenance & Hygiene.”
http://web4.audubon.org/bird/at_home/bird_feeding/feeder_maint.html

Note: some hyperlinks in this article have been updated since its initial publication.

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“Water Features for Your Garden”
Presented by the WSU Master Gardeners

WHAT: Northwest landscaper Gary Zweifel speaks on “Water Features for Your Garden,”
WHERE: Washington State University Mount Vernon Northwestern Research And Extension Center at 16650 State Route 536 (Memorial Highway)
WHEN: Tuesday, June 12th
TIME: 1 - 2:30 PM
COST: No Charge – free event
INFO: First come, first served. For more information call 360-428-4270, ext. 0