

Pond Pointers to “Pond-er”

(updated 9/07)

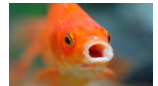
After your pond is installed we will schedule a walk-through to go over several things with you. We specialize in creating natural looking ecosystems, but this takes time to achieve. So, unlike a brand new car, at first a brand new pond might not look quite right.

It’s not uncommon to think that your new pond looks too rock-intensive rather than “natural.” Your pond’s edges will look overexposed, and the rocks on the bottom of the pond will be pretty much spotless. Rest assured things will change quickly once you add plants in and around your water feature.

You will most likely also see some of the pond’s liner showing in various places - around the edges or under the water - and most of the time this happens as your new pond “settles.” Anyone buying a brand new house expects some settling. Expect some as well with your new pond. Heavy water flow can also result in exposed liner. This is easily remedied by adding some extra gravel or rock.

One sign that your pond’s water is starting to get “balanced” is the emergence of algae. It will begin growing on the rocks and will look fuzzy. This is good because the algae provide food for the fish you’ll soon be adding to the pond. Words of caution, though, don’t add fish until the algae starts growing.

Ponds built in the summer months - June through August - can typically accommodate starter fish and plants right away. Otherwise we strongly recommend you wait until that time frame before introducing these to your pond because of availability and cool temperature survival concerns. Plants and fish are critical to establishing and maintaining a healthy ecosystem, and unfortunately it’s not uncommon to lose some of your smaller starter fish.



Koi, comets and goldfish are popular in ponds. Not only are they nice to look at, but when koi grow to about nine inches they eat string algae. Koi bought when they’re small aren’t terribly expensive, and we have a lot of customers who say “those 25 cent feeder goldfish” have been great.

Many people enjoy feeding their fish, but it’s not necessary. Their ecosystem provides everything the fish need. If you do want to feed your fish just be careful not to overfeed them because they won’t eat as much algae, and that will throw your water’s balance off.

Early spring is a critical time for fish health. That’s when the fish and “bad” bacteria come out of “hibernation,” compromising your fish’s protective slime coat. Look for red spots, waxy areas or fin rot which could be signs of bad bacteria in the water proliferating and attacking the fish. If this happens plant-safe medicines are available to help your fish recover, and they will probably need to eat medicated food for a couple of weeks. Your fish can also benefit from uniodized plain salt.

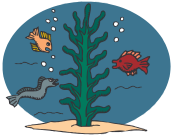


We incorporate “fish garages” into every pond we build. These provide shady places for your fish on hot summer days. They are also a hiding place for your fish in the presence of a predator. Blue herons tend to cause the most concern, but, in addition to fish garages, a water scarecrow or fishing line strung over the pond are also good deterrents.

Like most things your pond will require some maintenance, but it doesn't have to be drudgery. Once the water reaches 40°, usually sometime in March, you'll want to give your pond a good spring cleaning. After that it's important to establish a schedule for adding water treatment products so all of your hard work doesn't go to waste. Barley straw should be changed out every six to eight months, and don't forget to check your skimmer to remove built up debris.

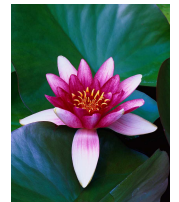


Throughout the season remember to trim your plants and remove any dead leaves. An occasional squirt of water will knock the aphids off the plants, and that will make the fish happy because they eat aphids.



Now some words and advice about string algae. There are several types of algae and include (in non-technical terms) pea-soup algae. This type of algae makes your water murky and is a sign that your water is out of balance. Black algae usually appear in the spring in shaded yards. It's not harmful - just ugly. Black algae covers the rocks in slime but usually disappears in on its own in two to six weeks. String algae are good and should always be present in a true, healthy ecosystem. However, you don't want too much of a good thing, and string algae LOVE the Colorado sun. Stay on top of it or you'll battle it all season long. A small, flexible rake works well for removing algae manually. You can also let it collect in the skimmer as long as you remember to clean the net. String algae looks and feels slimy in the water, but if you wring it out you'll be surprised at how rough it feels. Toss the dried string algae in the trash, or better yet, add it to your compost pile.

Remember how we said above that plants are necessary for establishing and maintaining a healthy ecosystem? Here's how. Plants create shade and limit the amount of sun algae need to proliferate. Plus plants eat the same nutrients as string algae do, so they help to starve out the excess. Finally, and the thing people will notice most about pond plants is that they are *incredibly beautiful*. We recommend covering 60%-70% of your water's surface with a variety of water plants.



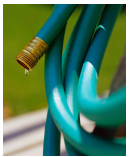
Some plants grow faster than others. When that happens it's easy to divide them. Lilies should be fertilized monthly and divided yearly while most other pond plants need to be fertilized every other month and divided every other year. Tropical plants can be safely added to ponds after the first of June. Feel free to add hardy plants as soon as the water temperature is comfortable for you to work in. Just remember that their availability is limited prior to May.

In our Education and Resources section you can find an article by Suzy Oligmueller of Water's Edge called, “Winterizing the Pond.” It's full of tips and information about how to care for your plants in preparation for the colder months.

Unseen, but necessary and important, is barley straw. It breaks down and releases a chemical that kills algae. The straw comes in a bag and needs to be changed out about every six months. Introduce barley straw in early spring so it can begin breaking down before the big algae “bloom” starts.

If, despite all of your efforts, string algae decides to set up camp we do have a kill-on-contact product that, in addition to our other water treatment products, is plant and fish safe as long as it’s used in the recommended dosages.

We have also gotten feedback from several customers who say using a cold water bacteria product throughout the winter results in less string algae in the spring.



We all learned long ago in school that water evaporates. Don’t forget that when it comes to your pond. If you don’t feel like standing at your pond with the garden hose an “auto-fill” tied into your sprinkler system is a good option. On average a pond loses 3/8” of water per day. Excessive temperatures, tall waterfalls, longer streambeds and splash-off can increase this figure.

You’ve worked hard to create this natural-looking ecosystem and get your pond’s water in balance. In order to keep it that way we’ve prepared a list “don’ts.”



Don’t change out more than one-third of your pond’s water (except during Spring Cleanings). It’s too much of a shock to the system and you’ll have to start all over with the balancing process.



City water is treated with chlorine/chloramines. When you do water change-outs be sure to add a dechlorinator when refilling the pond.



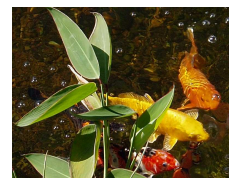
Herbicides, pesticides and lawn fertilizers can prove fatal for your fish. Be careful if or when you apply these products so none gets into your pond.

Come fall there are some things you will want to do in preparation for winter; however, don’t clean the filter mats in your BIOFALLS™ or change out the water at this critical time of year.



It’s not necessary to completely shut your pond down during the winter, and in fact, many people don’t. Pick a warm day about once a month to check the water level and add as needed.

If it gets extremely cold for an extended period of time, or if your pond is mostly shaded, you might want to consider using a bubbler or a heater to a minimum, just use it if the small opening in the ice for gases to escape. A 100-watt deicer/heater is available, and it costs much less to operate than older models do. Also keep an eye out for “ice dams” in your streambed that may causes a sudden drop in your pond’s water level. You can melt these with a garden hose.



You probably won't see your fish very much during the winter, and we strongly advise you not to feed them once the temperatures drop below 50° because they can't digest the food. Oddly enough, Cheerios™ are a good food option in the spring and fall. The cereal is low in protein and easily digested.

During the winter don't be alarmed if ice builds up. Just enjoy your new ice sculpture. Don't pound on it, though. Doing so could cause your fish to suffer a concussion, which could kill them. As the water warms up your fish will once again become more active.

The pond lover's goal is to have crystal clear water meaning you can see the bottom of your pond. Don't confuse this with what we call "bathtub clean." Nature isn't spotless, so remember that your pond won't and shouldn't be either. If your water starts turning colors what should you do? The list below, provided by the Colorado Water Garden Society, can help guide you in the right direction.

- Tea-colored water usually results from dead plant material or tree leaves that have settled on the bottom of the pond and rotted. Activated charcoal can help because it removes tannins.
- Milky water may be the result of high alkalinity. Check your water, adjust the pH and do a partial water change.
- Green water may be single-cell algae. Add more plants, and if you're feeding your fish, decrease that until your water clears up.
- Water that is clear to blue can be an indicator of good water conditions, but don't drink it.
- Yellow water may be the result of decaying leaves. Try a partial water change and remove the dead material.
- Black water could be caused by high pollution. You might want to consider cleaning the pond and improving aeration.
- Water that is reddish to brown might indicate silt, dirt or decaying leaves. A partial water change and added filtration could be the answer.
- Red water might indicate too much ferrous iron and it's recommended that you maximize aeration and change-out 25% of your pond's water.

The information above was reprinted, with permission, from the Spring 2007 Colorado Water Garden Society Newsletter.

One more note on water color. If you experience a sudden onset of green water, rather than a gradual color change from clear to murky, it's possible that some type of runoff from a recent lawn mowing or fertilizer application has gotten into the pond.

Water may also look a bit cloudy after some water treatment products are added. Don't worry. This clears up quickly.

Other tips:

- Check your water quality monthly.

- Do a partial water change-out each month. Drop a hose in the bottom of the pond and let the water run out the overflow.
- Don't forget to add a dechlorinator if necessary.
- Don't change out more than 10% of the water at one time.

And finally....

We have a dedicated Pond Service division to help you with everything we've talked about here. You can get all of your water treatment products, replacement filters and other pond supplies from us giving you more time to enjoy your pond. Our Pond Service division also has several maintenance packages available if you'd like us to take care of these chores.

Call the office at 303-660-5015 if you'd like more information.