PONDS NEED NOT APPLY

Create a disappearing waterfall in 12 easy steps.

BY GARTH EPP

POND-FREE WATER features, also known as "pondless," "no pond" or "disappearing" waterfalls, range in size from 12 in. tall and 8 in. wide, up to 20 ft. tall and wide. Many have long meandering streams, while others are simply falls that vanish into a bed of rocks. Because these disappearing waterfalls do not include ponds, the maintenance and upkeep on these water features is minimal.

The first step in the construction process is to determine the desired outcome of the project by the homeowners. I am not referring to visually how it should look, but more how they want their lives to improve with changes to their landscape. This answer to this question is key to the success of the entire project.

Once you have determined the motives for wanting such a feature, tour the yard and the interior of the home. Consider any location that will meet their desires and be enjoyed from both the interior and exterior of the home. Keep in mind that an outdoor water feature can be enjoyed from indoors.

It is also often believed that a backyard waterfall is restricted to corners of the lot. This is not true. In many cases, the corners are the worst places for falls.
PONDLESS WATERFALL

Begin the build

1 Use a garden hose to form the shape of the base of the falls where the water will disappear into the ground. Use brightly colored spray paint to create an outline on the ground. Make sure the area is not larger than the piece of pond liner you have purchased. This area will become the bottom collection basin for the water.

2 Place the spillway unit for the falls in position. This large plastic container will fill with water, then overflow and become the head of the waterfall. Depending on your desired outcome, you might simply have the unit rest on the ground and mound soil up around it, or you might choose to elevate it higher to get more height to the falls. For a gentle flowing stream, it's generally suggested to have the unit 6 ft. to 8 ft. away from the bottom basin.

3 Attach your plumbing pipes to the spillway before the excavation. Use a sealant like polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE, or plumber's) tape on all threaded fittings. Now is the time to make sure everything is watertight, before it's all buried and concealed. Once the pipe is sealed and in place, you can cover it with soil you excavate from the basin to hide it from view. It's a good idea to make sure the pipe has a gradual slope from the spillway unit to the basin so it can be easily flushed and drained if needed.

4 Use a level to ensure the unit is sitting on even ground. If the ground is tamped well and solid, it will prevent the unit from becoming uneven from the ground settling.

5 Dig the basin at the base of the falls. The basin does not need to be more than 24 in. deep. It's important to make sure the edges of the basin are level so it will fill evenly with water.

As your team digs the basin, use the soil to backfill around the water feature's spillway unit. It's a good idea to have someone stand in the spillway unit while it's being tamped and backfilled so it does not move out of position.

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Water features routinely rank among the top landscape design/build projects homeowners are interested in adding.
Once the basin is excavated, remove sharp objects such as roots or rocks from the basin. Now lay the geo-textile underlay in the basin, starting at the bottom, and work out all the slack so it conforms to the shape of the hole. The underlay is there strictly to protect the underside of the liner. You don’t need to line the future stream bed at this point.

Now place the liner over the underlay. The liner should extend outside the basin. It can be cut back later if necessary. It’s better to use a liner that’s too large than too small. Provided all was measured and planned ahead, it should fit correctly.

Place the pump vault in the basin, with several large pieces of drainage pipe to act as filler in the basin bottom. This will reduce the amount of rock needed to fill the basin and will eliminate the weight of the rocks resting directly on the interior of your pond liner.

Fill the basin with rinsed clean rock within a couple of inches from the top. Start with larger rocks on the bottom, and place smaller rocks on top. This acts as a natural filter for the feature.

Once the rocks are in the basin, fill it with water to clean the rocks. Use a small sump pump to expel dirty water. This will help
Going pondless is a quick and cost effective way to add a waterfall.

The goal is to make the stream and waterfall blend perfectly into the landscape, as though the home and yard were built around it. The stream should twist and turn, as this will make it look more natural.

Carefully select and place varying-sized rocks on the perimeter of the stream.

You can adjust and tweak the flow of the waterfall by placing smaller stones and gravel on the waterfall cascades until the desired effect is achieved. This will change the sound and appearance of the flowing water. Remember: Without exception, large waterfalls require the use of large rocks.

EPP is editor and owner of BuildingMyPond.com, an online resource dedicated to water gardening and water feature installation. He can be reached at 403/671-0797.