

Waterside Landscape

Selecting plants suited to the shores of ponds, lakes, and streams.

By G. Douglas Pullman, aquatic biologist,
and Douglas Chapman, horticulturist,
Dow Gardens, Midland, Michigan.



Ponds, lakes, and streams are often highly prized amendments to the landscape. A great deal of effort is commonly devoted to keep them weed free. The management technology is now available at a reasonable cost to satisfy the most discriminating pond, lake, or streamside property manager.

Unfortunately, water features are sometimes managed or landscaped to appear out of place or "unnatural." A backdrop of upland plant types, e.g. trees, shrubs, or herbaceous perennials, may appear attractive, but the riparian has failed to support the biological sys-

tem by introducing plants not well-suited to the moist or saturated soils surrounding a typical water body.

A large number of very ornamental marsh/bog and water plants are commercially available that are well adapted to oxygen-poor, water-saturated soils or for cultivation in the water body itself. A pond or lakeside can be put into perspective by the careful selection of ornamental aquatic and marginal plants.

Site Selection

The best location for water

plants is any part of the landscape that is continually flooded or soggy. A lake, pond, or streamside is ideal, but marshy, lowland areas shouldn't be overlooked. Usually, these sites will already contain some aquatic plants, such as cattails and prudent weeding may go a long way to establish an attractive waterscape.

Plant Selection

Choosing the right water plant for a particular location depends largely upon plant habit. Figure 1 is a classification of water plants that we use. It is a good idea to



NEVER introduce any of the so-called "oxygenating plants," i.e. submersed and free floating/suspended plants, to a pond, lake, or stream. Many of these plants can become severe management problems once established and should be reserved for aquariums and garden pools where escapement to natural water bodies can be strictly controlled.

Water Lilies

Without question, the royal family of the water plants is the water lily family. Hybridizers have developed plants bearing flowers of

nearly every hue imaginable. There are hardy and tropical day blooming varieties as well as exotic night blooming tropicals. The hardy hybrid water lilies at the Dow Gardens bloomed from late May through October, 1982, a display rivaled by few other plants. Select only the hybrid varieties as some of our native varieties, such as the White Water Lily or Cow Lilies, tend to be more aggressive and could potentially become a management problem. We generally recommend the following hardy water lilies to beginning water gardeners:

'*Chromatella*'-A very hardy variety with brown spotted leaves and bright yellow flowers

'*Marliac Rose*'-Rich green leaves, rose-colored flowers with yellow stamens, very floriferous

'*Rose Arey*'-Pure pink flowers

'*Attraction*'-Vigorous, red flowers. The lotuses are very striking but may be too aggressive in natural lakes and ponds; therefore, their use should probably be avoided.

Water Interface Plants

The continually moist or flooded soils at the water's edge are the locations for marginal and emersed

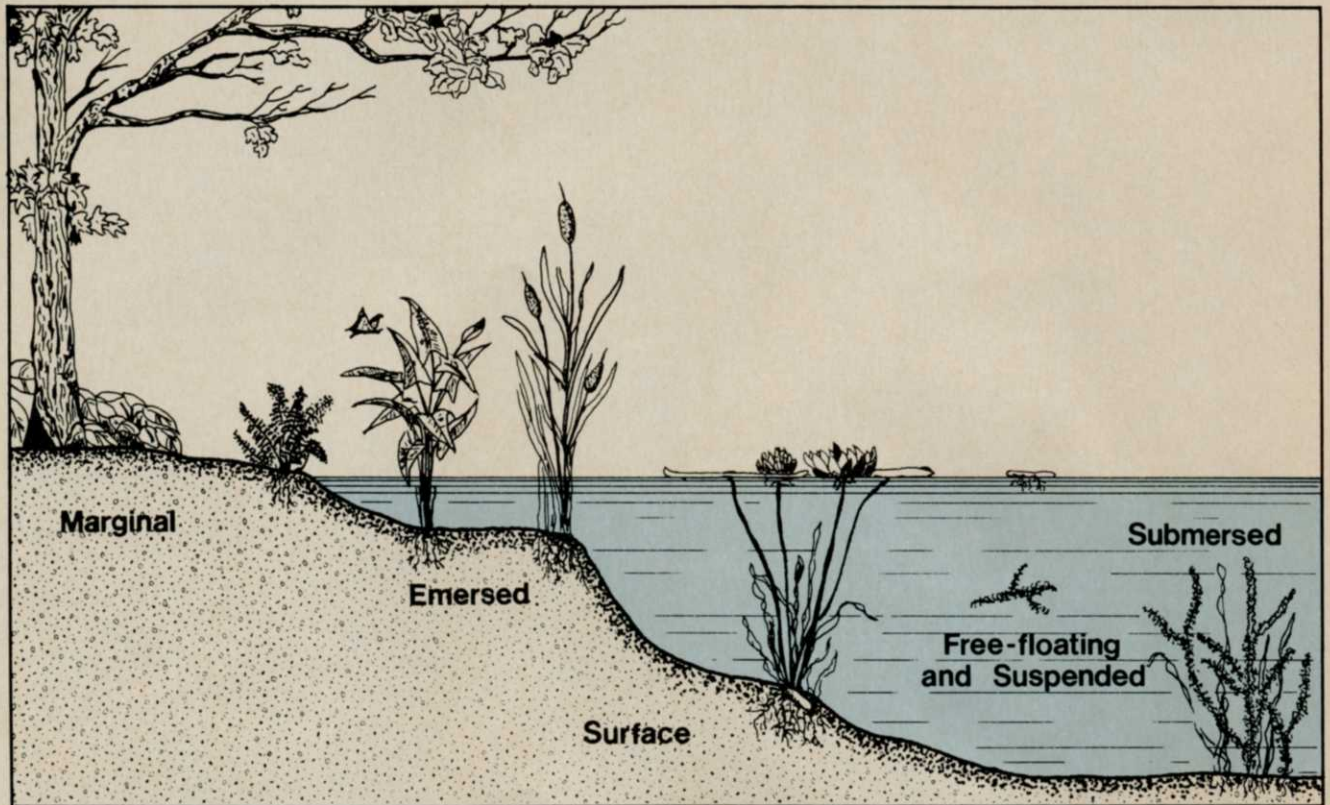


Figure One. Classifications of waterside plants.

plants respectively. Consider the Blueflag Iris for emersed planting and Louisiana Iris and Siberian Iris for marginal planting. Yellowflag is an exotic and can be difficult to control; therefore, it is not recommended.

Variiegated Sweet Flag is a beautiful foliage plant with green and white striped "iris-like" leaves. Arrow Arum is the finest of the arrowhead group with its compact habit and striking veination. Both the Arrow Arum and Sweet Flag are good for either emersed or marginal culture.

Cardinal Flower is known for vibrant red flowers and is a good marginal plant. Bog Bean has attractive white fringed flowers and will thrive in the water and on wet mud, making it a good ground cover. Also consider Bunchberry as a marginal ground cover. Pickerel Wood is valued for its foliage and blue flower spikes in the emersed zone. A favorite, because of its early yellow flowers, is Marsh Marigold and a double-flowered variety is now commonly available.

Other common plants that thrive in moist soils include *Hosta*, *Astilbe*, selected *Mimulus*, prim-

roses, and impatiens. Avoid Modern's Pink and Flowering Rush as both are exotic and have a potential to become serious pests.

Many ferns will also complement the riparian landscape. Cinnamon Fern and Royal Fern are two good choices.

It is always a good idea to consider the impact of deciduous leaf fall in water systems. Therefore, place deciduous shrubs and trees sparingly on the water's edge or, even better, at a "safe" distance from the shore (consider, also, wind direction).

A number of shrubs will thrive in saturated soils, such as Redosier Dogwood, Hibiscus or Swamp Mallow, Sweet Pepperbush, and pussy willows. Other worthy shrubs are in the genus *Spiraea*.

The weeping willow is generally considered the classic tree in the riparian landscape. It does require some maintenance because it drops a great deal of debris on the landscape and water. There is quite a variety of trees worthy of riparian consideration. Tree selections fall into three groups, according to the ability of the tree to withstand varying periods of root crown

inundation or low soil oxygen.

Swamp Species

Outstanding "swamp trees," or those typically growing in standing water for most of the year, are Dawn Redwood, Bald Cypress, the larches, Eastern Redcedar, and European Alder.

Flood Plain Species

Flood plain trees are those found in flood plain areas, being able to withstand periods of root crown inundation, lasting several weeks during the growing season. Representative flood plain species are the Red Maple, Silver Maple, White Ash, and Eastern Redbud.

High Water Table Species

The final tree group is comprised of those species that thrive in well-drained soils yet require a high water table. Consider River Birch, Paper Birch, Hemlock, and European Beech for such sites.

Appropriate plant selection for pond, lake, and streamside areas will not only assure greater plant vigor but will also make a water feature an even more exciting and natural part of the landscape. **WTT**