

Aquatic gardens popular additions to home yards

Making a client's landscape stand out from the neighbors' is often as easy as installing a little water feature.

■ Aquatic gardens, enjoyed and used by ancient Egyptian, Indian and Oriental civilizations, are enjoying renewed popularity among today's homeowners, according to a report from the University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service.

Aquatic gardens can be an interesting and rewarding addition to any home landscape, no matter what the size of the yard, says horticultural extension agent Ray Bosmans.

"In addition to the interesting plant life they contain, aquatic gardens attract a variety of fascinating animals, including birds, frogs, turtles and more," Bosmans says. "A small garden pool can provide hours of education and entertainment, especially for children."

The development and increased availability of pre-formed pools, flexible liners and other containers have helped foster the current interest.

"These new materials are a great improvement over the old tedious process of building ponds out of concrete," says Bosmans.

Many choices—The style and size of an aquatic garden can range from a simple, above-ground tub garden suitable for a patio, deck or balcony, to a large pond constructed with a flexible liner.

"Many people begin with a very small aquatic garden and enjoy it so much that they later move up to as large a pond as space and budget will allow," Bosmans continues.

No matter what size the homeowner chooses, the first step in designing the aquatic

garden is to think about where it will actually be enjoyed the most by the client and family. Some good locations:

- near a patio;
- near a porch;
- within view of a window.

There are several other things to consider when selecting a pond site. First, a pond should be located where it will get at least five hours of full sun a day if you want to include flowering aquatic plants in the design. This is the minimum sunlight needed to produce blossoms on most flowering aquatic plants, though a few tropical water lily species will bloom in semi-shaded sites.

Avoid installing the pond directly under trees because leaves and debris will fall into it. And don't locate the pond in the lowest spot in the yard because surface run-off may wash mud and other contaminants into it.

An aquatic garden that is well balanced with plant and animal life does not need filtration. To achieve a balanced pond, build it as large as possible. Bosmans recommends a minimum size of 40 to 50 square feet by 18 inches deep.

"A very small pond is subject to rapid and frequent temperature changes, which stimulate excessive algae growth," he explains. "It also limits your choice of plants."

A pond can either be formal or informal in shape. Informally-shaped ponds are the most popular, according to Bosmans, because they allow the designer to use imagination and the soft irregularity found in nature to create a small haven for relaxation.

Adding plants—To help reduce algal growth, make sure the pond contains

enough plants to cover about 60 percent of the water's surface, with one bunch of submerged plants, such as anacharis and parrots' feather, for each one to two square feet of surface area. The submerged plants will provide additional oxygen in the water for fish, an important element of any aquatic garden.

"Fish are essential because they eat insects, including mosquito larvae, which develop in standing water," Bosmans says. "Ordinary goldfish are a good choice because they're quite hardy."

Aquatic plants are numerous and



An aquatic garden need not be as grandiose as this one, but it should be at least 40 square feet by 18 inches deep, according to extension agent Ray Bosmans of Maryland.

among the easiest plants to grow. They actually prefer being grown in heavy soil and have very few insect or disease problems. Pests that do appear can be controlled by simply removing the affected leaves.

Some plants you might want to choose from include:

- the many hardy water lilies;
- lotus;
- marginal plants such as cattails, arrowhead and pickerel weed; and
- floating plants such as water hyacinth, water lettuce and water fern.

For a special attraction, you can add one of the exquisite types of tropical lilies whose vivid colors of red, blue, yellow, white and magenta are unsurpassed for their size, beauty and fragrance. These lilies benefit greatly from fertilization using special fertilizer tablets that are inserted into the pots once a month (or less if extended-release tablets are used).

No matter the size, shape or scope of the aquatic garden, it's an excellent addition to a customer's fine landscape.



Aquatic gardens can be designed in a variety of shapes, from figure-eight (left) to kidney-bean (center) to irregular (right).