

WATER GARDENING FROM A RETAIL POINT OF VIEW

by Rita Randolp, Tennessee Flower Growers Association

My first introduction into water gardens was many years ago, as a child, my father took me to a garden that belonged to an old friend of his. It was a wonderful rambling estate that had a lovely old stone house and well established gardens. There was a long, sloping, shaded hillside that had a creek running through it, twisting and turning under trees and azalea beds, until it emptied into a natural pond at the end of the hillside. We went there often to deliver rhododendrons and other specimen plants, but while my father and his friend would discuss the plant material, I would run take my shoes off and play in the shallow creek.

On one of the trips to this garden, I made my usual side step to the creek to play, and to my horror...there was no water running! The old friend, seeing my disappointment, quickly replied, "Oh, don't worry, I'll turn it on for you!". He took a few steps over to the well-house and turned on a pump that would bring life back to the creek. You can imagine how strange it might have been...the disappointment in knowing it wasn't REAL, and the relief that the water would return. It left me totally confused.

As I got older, I myself, learned how to use this trickery. Water features have pleased many a child since, of all ages. We have several ponds, tanks with spouting frogs, and fountains, as do most retail garden centers. The problem now develops of how to tell folks how to take care of these things. It takes quite allot of dedication to properly educate the retail public on how to succeed at water gardening. Do we do a good job at it?

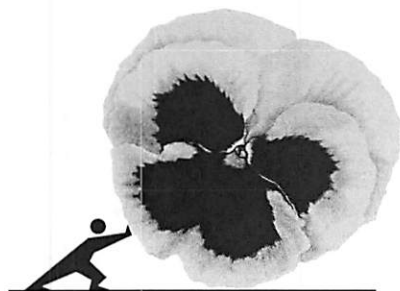
The growth of water gardening as a hobby, is different than the growth of the industry. And make no mistake, there IS a difference.

We know that to really understand the delicate balance that takes place in the water feature, takes time and patience to learn properly. Teaching our customers the difference between fountain pumps and filtering pumps is the service we should be providing, and teaching them that a very small pond should not be placed in full sun, especially if you expect to raise fish.

The wide selection of filtering materials available is seldom displayed, but the simple solution is to provide a hand-out to your customers explaining such items exist and are available. Hand-outs are a personal way of demonstrating your knowledge, and ability to answer customers questions. It's disturbing to me that many landscapers and garden centers opt to offer one and only one water gardening system just so that they don't have to train employees or their customers on the large variety that exists. Also, the fact is, that many companies offer 'pond kits' that are under-powered and under-filtered, when taken into consideration that most novice water gardeners are certain to overload the system, falling in love with every fish they see. I know, I did the very same thing at first, until I learned how to balance the system with more plants, better filters, and larger water volume, not to mention regular water changes.

Offering a small list of books on the subject is a good idea. We keep a single copy of the few we want to suggest on hand. This prevents us from having to keep a stock of books on hand, and allows our customers to preview the sampling before buying.

Education is key in keeping the hobby alive, and ensuring that the water garden industry will not become a passing fad.



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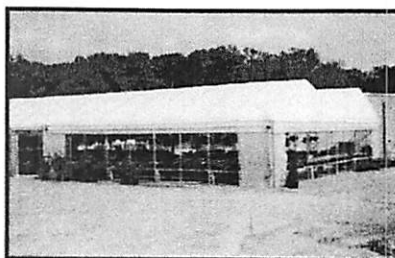


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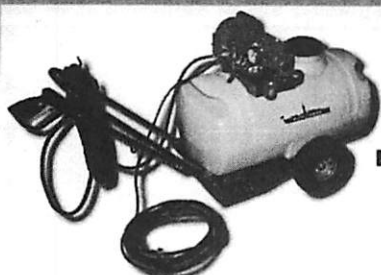


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