

ON THE HOUSE



Backyard Water Garden

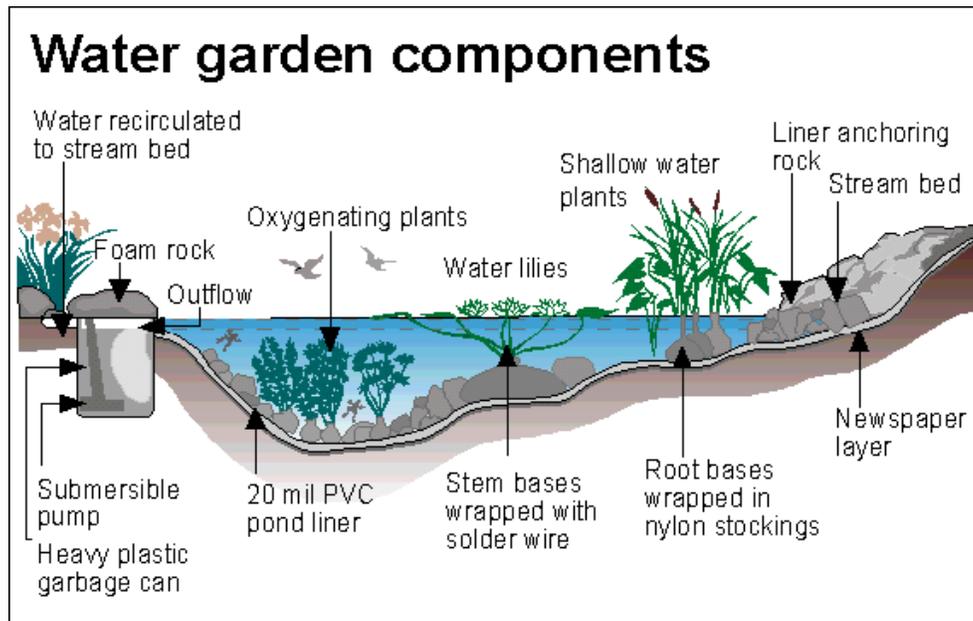
by James Carey and Morris Carey

If a tropical vacation is not in the family budget, consider bringing a little bit of paradise to your backyard by constructing a water garden or pond. Whether it be free-form designed and installed to your precise specifications or prefabricated from one of many designs, the result can be an attractive and appealing addition to your landscape. What's more, in most cases, it's a project that can be accomplished in a weekend.

While there is no real limit as to size, most water gardens take up very little space. A pond and stream can occupy as little as 8 feet by 10 feet, although twice this size is closer to ideal. Existing water – such as a garden spigot – has nothing to do with where the water garden is located. However, proper planning is important to integrate the pond into existing landscaping so that it looks like nature placed it in your yard. Best of all, constructing a water garden requires no special skills. Still, you will need a strong back to remove existing soil, and to import rocks and plants to create your new oasis.

Unlike a swimming pool, a water garden is shallow. Most projects will require less than two feet of excavation, the average depth ranging from 18 to 24 inches. Once excavated, the area is lined with a heavy **vinyl waterproof liner** or a **prefabricated plastic pond** is placed into the excavated area. **Decorative rocks, small stones** and **coarse gravel** can be randomly placed around the pond bottom. This also offers the vinyl liner an added level of protection. The entire area doesn't need to be covered; just enough to conceal most of the liner and to anchor the plants in position. Locate the pond in an area where the terrain is already low. This will lessen the amount of excavation required, and the soil that is removed can be used to build up the area to serve as a landscape berm.

Contrary to popular belief, a backyard pond doesn't have to be a breeding ground for mosquitoes or other pests. Modern water gardens contain a **closed-cycle pump** and **filtration system** that keep the water moving and filtered. And what the filter doesn't take care of, your school of debris-scavenging fish will. Contact a local pet shop for more information on the type of fish and how to care for them. When properly planned and installed, your water garden should be virtually maintenance-free.



Continued... see reverse

Pumps come in a variety of shapes and sizes. They are rated according to the amount of gallons per hour (gph) of circulation. The size of the pump is relative to the size of the pond and the length and height of the stream or waterfall.

A **110-volt outdoor electrical outlet** will be required to operate the pump. Due to its proximity to the water, it should be protected by a **ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI)**. Check with your local building department for information on codes and methods for installation of an electrical outlet.

Materials Checklist!

- ✘ Vinyl waterproof liner
- ✘ Prefabricated plastic pond
- ✘ Decorative rocks, small stones, coarse gravel
- ✘ Closed-cycle pump
- ✘ Filtration system
- ✘ 110-volt outdoor electrical outlet
- ✘ Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI)
- ✘ Flexible plastic tube
- ✘ Plants and greenery

Water pumped from the pond can be sent via a **flexible plastic tube** to a stream bed or waterfall or to a simple, yet decorative fountain spray located somewhere within the pond. Stones for the stream bed and waterfall should vary in size, with a slant toward larger rocks to create the illusion, as well as the sound, of moving water. You'll need lots of rock consisting of both roundish boulders and flatter shale-type stones. It helps to have the material dumped as close to the worksite as possible to save steps.

Among the important elements to constructing a successful pond are the **plants and greenery** placed around its edges. In addition to providing color and helping to create a natural setting, they provide an environment that is attractive to frogs, turtles and birds.

If they don't show up on their own, they can be imported. They are a must to keep your school of scavenging fish company.

Selecting the proper plants also helps the water from becoming stagnant by keeping it properly oxygenated, fresh and clear. The water lily, water hyacinth and lotus are the most popular flowering aquatic plants. For shallow water along the perimeter, consider suning arrowhead, pennywort, water hawthorne or sweet flag.

In addition, your water garden should contain underwater oxygenator plants such as anacharis or caboma. Figure about two bunches for each square yard of the pond's water surface. Each of these plants does best when placed at different depths, therefore the base of the pond should be sloped or stair-stepped to the shore to facilitate planting.

Finally, a word about safety... A youngster can drown in two feet of water. Therefore, you'll want to keep the safety of children in mind as you design and build your backyard oasis.

Morris and James Carey are nationally recognized experts on home building and renovation. They share their nearly half-century of experience as award-winning licensed contractors with millions of people nationwide through weekly radio programming and a syndicated newspaper column both titled "On The House."

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