

Idea Exchange January 2002 - All Aboard

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Water Garden World, Orlando, Fla., expanded into backyard garden railroads just in time for holiday season 2001.

The line extension seems like a natural for a business catering to backyard enthusiasts, according to founder Richard Chesler. Nearly every track layout shown in garden train publications feature water elements, Chesler said.

Water Garden World has set up a demo train, with a couple bridges over water, naturally. The business will also install the train systems for customers.

The water gardening center expected up to 50 people for a one-hour seminar on building garden railroads that it held in early December. The store also offered a 10 percent discounts on complete train sets purchased that day. Sets start at about \$200.

On the other extreme, some hobbyists have \$50,000 systems, Chesler said.

The center promoted the event by sending a postcard to its mailing list. The mailing also offered a 20 percent discount on pond installations (\$5,000 or above) booked by the end of the year.

Booking involved scheduling with signed contracts and deposits.

Alkalinity Testing

Because alkalinity can impact the effectiveness of antimicrobials, be aware of pond water alkalinity before applying microbials for algae control, advised Dan Terlizzi of Aquatic Technologies in an article in the Spring 2001 Nursery and Landscape News. Terlizzi recommends testing alkalinity in the spring and the fall.

Not only does the practice potentially improve microbial performance and customer satisfaction, but it could lead to add-on sales of test kits (or testing services) and alkalinity adjusters such as calcium as appropriate.

A Classical Garden

Mystery writer Barbara Mertz (pen names Elizabeth Peters and Barbara Michaels), of Frederick, Md., has been a water gardener for 20 years, according to the Los Angeles Times. Her goldfish-stocked lily pond features a small statue of Egyptian king Ramses (Mertz holds a doctorate degree in Egyptology) and stone crocodiles, as well as a bridge and terraced waterfall.

She also keeps a second pond for Egyptian lotus in a sunnier area. The lotus pond is surrounded by Japanese iris and assorted thyme placed to be walked on to release its scent.

Elsewhere in the garden, overlooking her pet cemetery, is a statue of Egyptian god Anubis, who leads the dead to justice. The 73-year-old's garden also feature a life-size, marble reproduction of Discobolos, a classical discus thrower, behind a lighted reflecting pool and in front of pillars and an arch.

Otterbine On Aerators

When choosing an aeration system, Otterbine Barebo Inc., Emmaus, Pa., suggests the following guidelines: consider the system's strengths and weaknesses in regards to the particular pond.

A surface spray aerator is very commonly used on golf course waterways and a good choice when the customer desires an attractive surface spray. Also, because of their 360-degree circulation patterns they can be used for regular and irregularly shaped ponds.

A floating horizontal aspirator doesn't offer any spray patterns but is physically visible from the surface. It can be used for long, narrow canals with at least six feet in depth. The submerged horizontal aspirator is very similar to the floating aspirator but is installed at the bottom of the pond so that there is no visible surface presence. The submerged aspirator

can be used for shallow ponds that need strong aeration and circulation and the client wants to maintain a natural appearance.

The bottom-diffused aerator provides no visible surface spray. It has a high oxygen transfer and mixing rates in water that is more than twelve feet deep, such as in large, deep ponds.

In addition to functional aerators, Otterbine offers an array of aesthetic fountains, including its Instant Fountain line for small pond owners and five models of giant fountains for larger installations, such as golf courses. Triad (shown), the company's newest giant model, provides a three-tiered spray effect with spray height up to 50 feet and spray diameter up to 42 feet depending on motor. Optional accessories include wind-controls and subrol motor controls.

For more information, contact Otterbine at (800) AER8TER, www.otterbine.com.

Tips On Annual Reviews

Formal annual employee performance reviews can motivate employees and lead to increased productivity; however, they can also be a huge waste of time and do more harm than good, according to consultant Dan Coughlin of The Coughlin Co. Inc.

Some common mistakes include not taking the process seriously; sending employees mixed messages; not explaining ratings; not providing positive and negative consequences for changing/not changing certain behaviors; and being vague.

Water Garden News seeks your ideas on building water-garden businesses — whether it be better retailing, installation and design tips, how to retain and motivate employees, or how to market your business. We'll pay \$50 for published submissions. Please send your ideas (50-200 words) and photos if appropriate to: Idea Exchange, Water Garden News, 3 Burroughs, Irvine, CA 92618; fax (949) 855-3045, or e-mail bhutchins@fancypubs.com. Water Garden News cannot take responsibility for return of materials.

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