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Idea Exchange October 2004 - Temperature Drop Hints

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Paying attention to ponds in the fall in five critical areas can help keep them healthy until spring, according to Jungle Labs of Cibolo, Texas.

Debris: In additional to lowering oxygen levels, debris, such as dead leaves, can also provide nutrients for algae come spring. If more than one-half inch of sludge has accumulated at the pond bottom, owners should either clear it out or apply a cool-weather biological product to help decompose the leaves and other sludge.

Water: Check the pH level regularly, and adjust as necessary. Jungle says pH should be between 6.5 and 7.5. Jungle also advises keeping at least some water from freezing, either by a deicer or bubbler, so equipment can run regularly without the risk of freezing.

Fish: Feed wisely. Switch to a higher-carb, lower-protein diet to fatten fish as water temperatures drop. Stop feeding before water drops to 55 degrees Fahrenheit. At this point, fish will stop digesting food and undigested food will decay, possibly leading to an internal bacterial infection.

Plants: Keep plants trimmed to a minimum during the winter so their foliage doesn't fall into the water and rot, causing methane and sludge build-up. Stop fertilizing. Hardy bog plants can be left alone as long as their roots and tubers are not allowed to freeze. Hardy lilies can be dropped to the bottom of the pond, below the freezing level. Tropical lilies and sensitive bog plants should be removed and stored in moist sand during the winter.

Pests: Spray neighboring fruit trees with a winter oil for aquatic pests, such as waterlily aphids, that will overwinter in trees. Also, waterlily beetles like to hide under yellowing foliage.

Cooperative Displays
A display feature at public areas, such as a shopping mall, can be a great way to attract attention to water features in general and to your company. One way to reduce the expense of building the feature is to cooperate with other, non-competitive firms.

This is the approach several companies in the San Diego area took when placing a display pond in a courtyard at an upscale, outdoor mall in Carlsbad. The partners are KRC Rock, Aqua Terra Water Designs, Armstrong Garden Centers, Africa Thatch LLC, Samia Rose Topiary, Lighting Distinctions and Merchant's Landscape Services Inc.

Each company is mentioned on flyers available next to the water feature.

Wise Water Use
A well-designed pond can use three or four times as little water as a lawn with the same surface space, depending on the region. This is worth crowing about, particularly in areas where water usage is an issue, said Jan Phillips of Shady Lakes Water Gardens in a Pondapalooza 2004 seminar, "Pondscaping & Smart Use of Water."

So what makes a pond well-designed?

First, it is built with a water-tight material. Phillips' preference: flexible EPDM pond liners. More rigid materials, such as concrete and pre-formed liners, are vulnerable to cracking-and leaking-with weather changes.

Next, site the pond so that it receives no more than 8 hours of direct sunlight a day. Between 6 and 8 hours is optimal in Phillips' area, near Albuquerque, N.M., and three hours is the minimum. More sunlight evaporates too much water and burns many aquatic plants, including hyacinths, shell flower and variegated water celery.

A windbreak, even low landscape plantings, is essential to keep the wind from blowing water out of a feature.

Water depth is another consideration. The shallower the water is, the quicker it warms and the higher its evaporation rate. For Phillips, a depth of 2 feet will cool the water, reduce evaporation and prevent algae growth. She recommends deeper for ponds in full sun.

Plant adequately. The more plants, the more sun protection the water gets. For reducing evaporation, Phillips recommends planting 50 to 75 percent of the surface area. Waterlilies, with their broad leaves, are a natural choice. Floating and short growing aquatics such as hyacinth can reduce evaporation by 10 percent, Phillips said. Tall, broad-leaved plants such as canna, lotus and taro will increase water loss.

We want your ideas on building water garden businesses. We'll pay $50 for published submissions. Please send your ideas (50 to 200 words and photos if any) to: Idea Exchange, 3 Burroughs, Irvine, Calif., 92618; fax: (949) 855-3045; or e-mail eanderson@bowtieinc.com. Sorry, we cannot return materials.