

Customers View Koi Fish as Pets

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Wanda is the big fish. She is 38 inches long and quite a celebrity at Across the Pond. The current Water Garden News poll asks visitors to weigh in on whether their customers consider koi 'pets' or 'pond decor.' To date, the results are 80 percent in favor of 'pets.'

This is not surprising to those of us who specialize in selling koi and other fish for ponds and water gardens. Koi fish are relatively easy to raise, and they have decent life spans. Unlike goldfish won at the county fair, koi fish can live for many years. By nature, koi fish are gregarious and sociable. They can provide a unique interaction with their keepers.

There are 13 basic types of koi fish and more than 100 varieties, each with a unique color patterns, scale variations and body shapes. We source our koi fish both domestically and internationally to offer customer a range of varieties and grades. We hand-feed all the larger fish to acclimate them to human contact. Koi prefer company, and once they recognize you personally, they become attached just like other pets.

While it has been my experience that most customers treat their koi fish as pets, some do buy koi fish just for decoration. Keep that in mind when stocking your inventory.

Conversely, if you are a visual person who sees koi fish only as an accessory to a pond or water garden, remember that many of your customers might be looking for more than aesthetics when it comes to selecting koi fish. They might prefer to 'adopt' rather than purchase.

Tips for selling koi fish as pets: Hand-feed the koi fish. This gets the koi fish used to human interaction and it provides entertainment for customers. Koi fish are a peaceful breed, but they are aggressive feeders, so it can be quite entertaining to watch the water 'boil' when the koi fish are teaming to eat. Many customers come to our store just to feed the koi fish. Provide sufficient oxygen. Koi fish are hardy, but they always need quality, well-oxygenated water. When our customers hand-select the koi fish they want, we bag it and fill the bag with oxygen for the trip home. Surprisingly, not all fish vendors add oxygen to the shipping bag for carry-out customers.