

Forecasting the Winter Weather

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Pond and water garden businesses can expect more unique winter weather across the United States this year than seasons prior, according to Thomas Downs, a meteorologist with Weather 2000, a long-range weather forecasting and consulting firm in New York City that specializes in weather derivatives and weather risk-management research. For the southeastern coastal region, from Texas to South Carolina and parts of Tennessee, Downs reported signs of a late to moderate El Nino pattern.

This should not conjure up memories of the 1997 El Nino, which spawned an oddly mild winter in many parts of the nation, Downs said. Instead, this version of the pattern should provide a cooler winter in the North and a milder winter in the South, he said, but nothing distinctively drastic. See Pattern Descriptions sidebar below for more information about El Nino and La Nina patterns.

The past season witnessed more of a La Nina pattern, Downs said, but this season can expect some change. The results might include damper, wetter and cooler weather in the South than in the last two years, Downs said.

Though meteorologists cannot say with certainty that an El Nino pattern will emerge, Downs said that if it does then the Midwest can enjoy a kinder winter than those prior. "Illinois has been very snowy the last two winters," he said. "Illinois and Wisconsin should be a little milder in those areas than in the last two years."

Chicago is the exception, along with areas from Cincinnati to New York to Boston, Downs said. Meteorologists predict that the coming winter in the northern area to southern New England will be colder than the last, he said.

On the opposite side of the coast, Southern California can expect increased rainfall this season, Downs said. Increased moisture will come to New York City and all the way down through Washington, D.C., forecasters predict.

For pond and water garden owners and businesses, the most conducive weather environments for the coming winter season are no different than usual. Southern California and most of the desert southwestern areas of America, as well as Texas along the Gulf Coast, should experience decent temperatures for outdoor pond enthusiasts, Downs said. Arkansas, Oklahoma and southern Tennessee should experience good climate conditions as well, he said.

Companies, however, should not rely too heavily on weather forecasts six to nine months ahead of season, Downs said. "You can't get too specific," he said, "but [the El Nino pattern] will spice things up a bit."

Pattern Descriptions

El Nino and La Nina represent sustained sea surface temperature anomalies. Causes remain unclear.

El Nino-Southern Oscillation, commonly called El Nino, refers to intense monthly or seasonal fluctuations in the air pressure approaching the South American coast. The fluctuations are caused by warm surface waters moving eastward from the equator, which occurs every three to eight years.

La Nina-Southern Oscillation, commonly called La Nina, refers to the air pressure change between tropical eastern and western Pacific Ocean waters, when warm water is further west than usual.

(Courtesy of U.S. Department of Commerce National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration)

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