

Overwintering Koi Fish for Clients

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Some koi fish predators, such as muskrats and otters, prove extremely difficult to keep away. Jacob Langeslag, owner of Aqua Eden in Faribault, Minn., reported a recent problem with minks.

Overwintering koi provided Jacob Langeslag with Aqua Eden a valuable service for clients and a way to make extra income over the slower winter months. (Courtesy of Kathleen Buckner/BowTie Inc.) Unlike raccoons, which Langeslag said were the main koi fish predator in the area, minks dive right into the pond. Though minks live in his area year-round, Langeslag said they prove particularly destructive to koi fish ponds during winter.

He said minks manage to get through pond nets and get at the koi fish. He reported visiting customers in the spring to clean their ponds and finding every koi fish gone.

Langeslag was stumped about how to keep the minks from getting at the koi fish. Then he hit upon a solution: "We've started to offer the service of babysitting (koi fish) for customers in the winter."

While Langeslag had heard of overwintering koi fish as service, he had not tried it until last winter. Langeslag said it was a good fit with his business model.

"For some of the dealers that actually koi fish, it's a liability for them if they bring in (outside) fish," he said. Since Langeslag does not breed fish, he did not have to worry about exposing a fish stock to infection.

Langeslag said he took customers' koi fish in the fall and returned them in spring when he visited to clean out the customers' ponds. Between koi fish predators and variable weather conditions, Langeslag said, "That's the safest way to overwinter the larger fish that we've found."

Koi fish belonging to different customers were kept in separate tanks, and each customer paid to reserve a tank over the winter. For customers that view their koi fish more as a commodity and are not concerned about getting back the exact specimens they bring in, they can opt to overwinter their koi fish in a communal tank at a lower rate.

Caring for the koi fish over the winter proved relatively easy, Langeslag said. He avoided overcrowding the koi fish and kept the tanks at a relatively cool temperature so the koi fish stayed in hibernation mode. Langeslag provided aeration, and filters proved unnecessary. He changed the water regularly and monitored water levels.

The service proved very successful, Langeslag said. "We're going to be expanding it this year," he said, "with the results that we had."