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## Putting Your Garden Pond to Bed for the Winter

### Article

Water gardening or ponding has become a favorite pastime of many Utahns. Just because we are in a desert state doesn't mean that you can't have a knock-em dead pond in any size yard, or even no yard with a small deck or patio unit.

Sterling Herrmann, owner of Desert Water Gardens in Salt Lake City's lower Millcreek area provides a wealth of knowledge with his obvious years of ponding dedication, boundless experience, a Master of Ponds, Master Gardener, and holding a bachelor's degree in Aquatic Biology at the University of Utah.

Sterling built his very first pond when he was fourteen and after years as a pond hobbyist opened Desert Water Gardens over 21 years ago. Visit with Sterling and be captivated as he excitedly translates the magical qualities of having a water garden, almost daring you 'not' to have a water garden.

Throw out your biggest negative about having a pond, the maintenance, the mosquitoes and Sterling's sure to dispel it on the spot. For those considering building their first pond, says Sterling, "Build the biggest pond that your space and your budget will allow". For those who want to build on what they already have this is the place to go for helpful resource and expert knowledge.

Desert Water Gardens is the Rocky Mountain regions largest supplier of aquatic and pond plants with between 150-175 different aquatic specimens at any one time. Many are zone climate tolerant and will come back yearly.

This time of year of course, it's time to begin putting your water garden to bed, the fall cleaning according to Sterling being more important than the Spring cleaning. The fall cleaning should be done mid-October to mid-November depending on how early the fall weather begins.

Now that the leaves have fallen, and the vegetation is beginning to die down it's time to cut back the vegetation near and on the water. Draining the pond down to two or three inches from the bottom allows you to net any fish, placing them in a bucket or container with some of their original pond water while you clean out the pond basin. Using a wet/dry shop vac, clear out the one inch to two inches of muck. Or, if your pond was properly designed it should have a low point, or catch basin at the bottom allowing you an area to scoop it all out.

We asked Sterling a few questions about feeding or caring for pond fish. Feeding? No, fish metabolisms slow down dramatically when the water temperature reaches and stays continuously below 50 degrees. Simply put, they don't eat.

They do of course need to breathe so you need to take care to provide some type of ice over protection for the pond.

- The easiest and best is to leave the water fall or feature active 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It also has the added benefit of providing additional enjoyment of the pond throughout the winter months.
- Second is to provide a heating ring that floats on the water surface, turning on when the water drops below 38 degrees, heating for a few minutes then turning itself off/on. This allows a small surface area, or doughnut to stay clear of ice allowing the transfer of oxygen from the air surface to the water.
- Third and the least expensive is to place an aquarium air pump, shielded from the elements in a plastic tub or cover



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with plastic air tubing running into the pond with an air stone at the end (this acts to also keep the air hose at the bottom of the pond). The waterfall pump, and heater option run about \$1 a day in electricity, the air pump costs about \$0.02 per day.

When it comes to Sterling's favorite plant, he just smiled and said "Whatever plant I happen to be looking at the time". Then, he began recounting how he loves to go what he calls Swamp Stomping", that is, tromping through swamps, bogs and wet regions whenever he travels or to visit his family on the East coast looking for new specimens.

Desert Water Gardens is a great place to visit when looking for ideas about your first pond, or to garner the experience to better enjoy your existing water garden. A pond isn't complete without a water feature or focal point, plant life and of course fish. The return on any investment into your pond is immeasurable. Says Sterling, "Sit by your pond for 30 minutes a day, everyday, and after your 21st day in a row you can throw away the valium".

**Sources**

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*by Staff Writer / Nick J. West (October 28th, 2009) Photo Credit / R. Bishop*

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