



### **Water in the Garden** **Gary Westlake**

The most extraordinary use of water that I have ever seen in a garden was at Longstock Water Gardens, a private garden in England. This garden, that is only open for visitors a few days a year, is entirely built around streams and ponds. Plants that you would not associate with water gardens were integrated near the edge of meandering streams. Even hosta were placed on mounds right in the water.

A couple of years ago during some of our moments of insanity, we built a waterfall beside the house with a pond at the bottom. Not satisfied with the small waterfall that we had next to our deck, we built one that cascades down the entire hill beside the house – about 20 feet of vertical drop. So far, except for a couple of leaks over the edge and a burnt pump, things have gone relatively smoothly. The sound is quite enjoyable and birds flock to it for their baths.

But you do not have to go to these extremes to have water in your garden.

I have seen a great little water feature in a garden that consisted of a slow drip from a tube that dropped into a shallow copper bowl. This drip is enough flowing water to attract birds since they have such keen eyesight.

You can have a water feature even on a balcony or deck. Look for one of those large plastic ice buckets, preferably black, that are sold for keeping beer and pop cold. They come with rope handles which are easily removed. Get a bit of sand or gravel to put in a thin layer on the bottom (this is optional). Put a cement block, one of the construction ones with two holes, on its end in the bucket. On the top hole which now forms a shelf, place a small submersible pump. Fill with water. You can put a rock on top of the block to hide it and around the bucket if you wish. On top of the rock you can put a spitting frog or statue to take the tube from the pump. After a day so the chlorine dissipates and the water clears, add floating plants like water lettuce and two or three goldfish if you wish and there you are. Its a water feature that takes minutes to create.

If you decide to go larger and build a pond, you can dig a depression for a pond in the ground and either use a preformed plastic pond or a rubber liner. You need to make sure the liner or preformed pond are well supported and protected from punctures with sand and/or liner. There are filters designed to keep ponds clear and you can use a float switch like the ones that are used for cattle troughs to replace water losses due to splashing and evaporation. We use a rubber bucket to hold the submerged pump in the pond. This keeps the debris from going into the pump because the water has to go over the

rim of the bucket. If you have fish, you need to make it at least three feet deep to keep them from freezing in the winter. You will also need an air bubbler or water heater to keep a hole clear in the ice. I have seen ponds where the gardeners have worked out the details by themselves or with the help of books but lots of advice can be had from the suppliers of pond equipment and supplies. Of course there are landscapers available who can construct the whole thing for you as well.

Many garden centres will carry some water plants. Animalia on Landsdowne carries water plants as does Scrimshaw Cabinets' Bird & Garden Emporium south of Marmora, and Burns Water Gardens in Baltimore. These places also supply pond equipment and supplies. You may be able to find pond equipment at a local farm supply store like TSC as well.

There is a pond business called S. I. Water Gardens just west of Blenheim, Ontario that has a number of ponds set up as display gardens. In front to advertise their business, they have a waterfall, but for safety reasons it cannot have open water. This large waterfall seems to disappear into the ground. What really happens is that there is a buried cistern under rocks held up by a metal grid. Clearly, you do not have to have open water to have a waterfall. They also have rocks with holes in them that can be placed over an underground reservoir to make a water feature with water bubbling out of the rock.

I cannot imagine a garden without any water in it and I don't think I have seen any major gardens without at least one water feature. It is so easy to incorporate at least a small one, that every gardener should try.

Previously published in the Peterborough Examiner.