

HEALTHY PONDS

The primary ingredient in any recipe for a healthy pond is the addition of lots of pond plants. Plants work for you to provide an environment of healthy water: they add shade, remove excess nutrients and toxins, and add oxygen to refresh the water. On the other side of this handout we describe how to choose plants for their specific contributions.

Probably the most vexing problem encountered by pond owners is the presence of algae. Algae growth is spurred by excessive organic materials, warm stagnant water and sunlight. Use the following suggestions to keep your water healthy and combat unwanted algae growth.

Keep the pond free of unwanted organic material. Use a net to scoop out leaves and debris. Trim dead foliage off pond plants rather than allowing it to decompose in the water. Do not overfeed fish. Undigested fish food is the primary pollutant in many ponds. Digested and expelled fish food is another pollutant, so keep your fish population under control. Most fish ponds, koi ponds in particular, require a bio-filter unit to deal with the fish waste. Bio-filters are great for any pond because they enhance the natural biological activity. When paired with an Ultra-violet light, which kills all free-floating algae particles, you are guaranteed to have crystal clear water.

Keep your pond water pH close to neutral. High pH is hard on fish and plants, plus it encourages algae blooms. To avoid stagnant water, add supplemental oxygen. This can be done with the addition of a waterfall, stream or fountain. High levels of oxygen promote natural biological activity. Shady ponds can be an exception: they are more likely to reach a natural balance without added water movement. Stagnant water is also an invitation to mosquitoes. Small fish & tadpoles can be added to eat mosquito larvae or you can use Mosquito Dunks, a safe, effective, and natural biological form of control.

Don't change your water unnecessarily. Each time new water is added to a pond, whether it comes from a well or a city water supply, it brings along high levels of free floating nutrients such as phosphate, which can quickly cause an algae bloom. Dechlorinate new water you add. Besides burning the gills of your fish, chlorinated city water can quickly wipe out your colony of natural beneficial bacteria. Bacterial organisms are a necessary component of healthy ponds. They consume excess organic material and toxins in the water and process them into basic nutrients in a form that plants can use. In a new pond or in one that is out of balance, we always suggest that you add beneficial bacteria to boost normally developing colonies. Never scrub your pond "clean". The natural green velvet coating that develops on the sides and bottom of the pond is home to your beneficial organisms.

Small fish will eat some algae, but don't count on them to keep your pond algae-free, they usually add more waste than they consume. Snails are great scavengers and will happily eat filamentous algae. Tadpoles are also algae consumers. Please do not add Bullfrog tadpoles to your pond. They are non-native predators of our native Tree Frog. Due to the Bullfrog's voracious appetite, it is feared that native Tree Frogs may completely disappear from the Pacific Northwest. Bullfrogs will also eat your small fish.

And finally, remember: bare expanses of open water are much more difficult to maintain than ponds filled with robust and beautiful water plants. Happy water gardening!



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