

Spring Pond Start-up

Spring is when the pond begins to awaken from its long winter dormancy as signs of life reappear with longer days. By spending a little extra time now, the pond will be ready for the upcoming season. This article is written as a general overview to give helpful ideas on spring pond start-up. The timeframe to perform the steps will depend on the region you live in.

It is not crucial to do these steps in exact order. A good start is to cut back any dead foliage remaining from the previous season. This allows room for new growth and prevents the accumulation of additional organic material in the pond. Be sure to cut back only those plants which put out leaves and flowers on new rather than old growth. Also, if the plants are hollow-stemmed, cut stems above the water line so the rootstock will not fill with water and rot. It is also important to remove decaying leaves and other organic material that have settled to the bottom of the pond during fall and winter. This can be accomplished in a number of ways depending on how much debris is in the pond. The easiest method is to use a skim net to remove the larger debris. Fine sediment will usually pass through the skim net and remain on the pond bottom. A pond vacuum is an excellent tool for removal of this sediment. After experimenting with a number of different models, we have found the Odyssey System Muck Vac to be one of the better units. If there is an excessive amount of debris in the pond, the best option may be to drain and clean the pond. This can be accomplished using a submersible pump placed in the deepest section to first drain the pond. You can then take a garden hose and continually flush water towards the pump until the pond bottom is clean or use a Shop Vac to remove the last inch or two of water and sediment. Draining the pond is usually a last resort because you must find a suitable place to house your fish while you clean the pond and rebalance the water once the pond is refilled.

Spring is also the time to begin fertilizing your pond plants. A good rule of thumb is to wait until the plants begin to show signs of new growth. We are located in USDA Zone 8 and typically begin fertilizing marginal plants in March and waterlilies in April. Be sure to use a time release fertilizer specifically designed for aquatic plants. A number of our customers prefer using the Agri-tab spikes early in the season because they last six months compared with one to two months for most aquatic fertilizer tablets.

In preparation for the upcoming season, check your plants to see if any of the varieties need to be divided or transplanted. The best time to divide or transplant aquatic plants is when they begin to actively grow. This gives plants the opportunity to rapidly develop new roots and thrive. Some people choose to plant directly in the bottom of the pond while others prefer planting in containers. We have found planting in mesh baskets to work extremely well. The mesh sides allow the roots to grow outside the container, helping to prevent the plants from becoming root-bound and allowing more surface area of the roots to be exposed to the water. This allows plants to filter excessive nutrients from the water which

helps to keep your pond clean and clear. Pea gravel works well as a planting media for most marginal plants, and helps to keep the water from becoming cloudy from soil escaping the pot. For waterlilies, we prefer to use a heavy clay soil or sandy loam, which will bind more nutrients for these heavy feeders. If desired, the soil can be topped with pea gravel or small river rock to prevent koi from uprooting the lilies. Many pond-keepers also choose to add floating plants, such as Water Hyacinth, to the pond. Be sure to wait until after the average last frost for your area before adding these semitropicals. For USDA zone 8 the average last frost is April 15.

With the warmer temperatures of spring, fish typically become more active as they awaken from winter dormancy. Their metabolism takes time to recover after dormancy, so begin to feed fish only when the average pond temperature rises above 50°. It is best to begin slowly and use a low protein wheat germ based food such as the Hai Feng Quick Grow or a medicated food while the water is cooler. Also, remember not to overfeed. When the water temperature is between 50 - 54°, feed approximately once per week. Increase feeding to once per day when the average temperature is over 55°.

As the fish become more active, it is also important to ensure that your pumps and filters are running properly. This includes checking for any damage caused by winter weather. If you have not cleaned your filters during the winter, it is best to thoroughly clean the filter material before restarting in spring. Add beneficial bacteria to biological filters in the spring. A liquid form, such as MicrobeLift, is faster acting than a dry powder form when starting your filter. You can switch to a dry bacteria later in the season for added maintenance doses. The beneficial bacteria help with water clarity and water quality along with preventing the buildup of ammonia and nitrites in the pond.