

Spring Prep for Your Water Garden

Well, our long winter is starting to lessen its grip and spring is on the horizon. Your sleeping pond is ready to awaken, so help your pond or water garden make a healthy and stress-free transition back to life. Remember that spring is a critical time to ensure you have a healthy and enjoyable pond system for the rest of the year so, before you “fire up” the water garden for its first use, there are a few things to keep in mind:

Pond and Water: The most important task in preparing a pond for the new season is to eliminate any leftover organic residue. If there has been an accumulation of leaves and other debris over the winter, clean the organic matter from the pond bottom with a net or pond vacuum. Keep in mind that rotting leaves can increase the water acidity. Early spring is a good time to consider a partial water change of up to 50%. Use your pump to partially drain the pond. Before refilling, let the water run a few minutes to flush the pipes. Add a water conditioner. Check the pH, ammonia, nitrite, and nitrate levels. If any of the levels are too high, you should do a partial water change, but do not completely drain and clean your pond as that will actually interfere with algae control and destroy your fragile ecosystem.

Equipment: Pond equipment should have been cleaned and packed away for the winter. If not, then make sure to clean all dirt and debris before restarting or placing in position. If pumps were allowed to run over the winter, they should be removed and cleaned. Check tubing, pumps and filters for obstructions and do a thorough cleaning. Replace UV bulbs, gaskets, and filter material as necessary. Turn on the pump to check that it is running properly and that the pre-filter intake is clean and free from debris. Check for leaks in water lines, streams, pond edges and filter boxes. Turn on the UV sterilizer after the biological filter is working properly and the water starts to turn slightly green.

Ecosystem: If this is a new pond, the best time to start the pond’s biological system is right now when pond temperatures are beginning to rise above 50 °F

(10 °C). As you run your pond, add beneficial bacteria and barley straw extract to jump start your pond into a healthy ecosystem as well as to prevent algae bloom.

Fish: First, fish need a careful inspection in spring following their winter dormancy. Check for any visual stress. Monitor the water temperature and start feeding your fish when the water temperature reaches a constant 50° F (but not before) as Koi have trouble digesting food in colder water. Feed a wheat germ-based food until the water temperature reaches 60°F at which point you can move to your full-season feeding program. Feed sparingly at first. Also, this is a good time to add medication as a preventative step, the proper amount of salt, as well as products to replenish vitamins and minerals in the water. Fish that have been kept indoors for the winter will need time to adjust to the pond's water conditions. A sudden change in temperature and pH level can have an adverse effect on the fish. That is why it is important to allow them to acclimatize gradually. Never pour or drop the fish into the pond. Watch them for a few days, as moving them can have a traumatic effect.

Pond Plants: Remove any dead plant matter. Divide and re-pot plants as needed. Fertilize plants to enjoy the maximum amount of growth and bloom in the growing season. Lilies and lotus should be fertilized every 3-4 weeks. Fertilize marginal (shallow water) plants every 5-7 weeks. Add floaters (water hyacinth, water lettuce) after the danger of frost has passed. Add Anacharis to reduce algae growth.

Once you have taken care of these items and your water garden is tuned up, kick back to enjoy it and marvel that Spring is well on its way.