Water gardens are a great landscape feature

When people think about landscapes, what typically comes to mind is flower/vegetable gardens, trees and shrubs. Thinking outside of the traditional landscape box, installing a water garden can add a lot of visual interest to the area. In addition, when properly planned and managed, water gardens are restful and relaxing.

There are kits available at the local gardening shop, or homeowners may want to design their own shape. This can be done by digging out the shape you want and putting down a pond liner.

Before you grab your shovel and start digging a hole, however, think about what you want the water garden and surrounding area to look like. Consider the placement, available sun and shade, and how it will relate to the rest of the yard. The advice of an experienced landscaper can be valuable for design and site considerations. Perhaps place the water garden near the patio or other seating area where it can be better enjoyed. Avoid areas where leaf accumulation will be a problem. Also avoid building a water garden in an area that receives runoff water from the surrounding area as this puts the pond at risk of chemicals in the runoff. Something else to keep in mind is placement near an electrical outlet for the pump.

The pond should be about 2 feet deep in order to have fish and plants. Water that’s too shallow can evaporate quickly in Oklahoma’s hot summers and freeze over in the winter.

Don’t confuse a water garden with an aquarium or a swimming pool. The management of a water garden is different. Feeding of water garden fish isn’t required when fish are stocked lightly. A good rule of thumb is one fish per 5 square feet of surface area. Be careful not to overfeed the fish, as excess waste and uneaten feed quickly degrades the water quality, resulting in dense green, turbid pond water; elevated ammonia levels; and even fish death.

While the use of chemicals and expensive filters keep the water crystal clear in a swimming pool, this is incompatible with a water garden. Aquatic plants are the best way to filter and treat the waste produced by fish in a water garden. Choose plants such as lilies and arrowheads because they help limit the growth of algae and phytoplankton by competing for light and nutrients. The plants should shade 50% to 75% of the pond’s surface. A few other good choices include lotus flowers, arrowheads, pickerelweed and water lily (Nymphaea spp.).

Just as homeowners do with a swimming pool, take precautions with a water garden and keep safety a top priority. Make sure toddlers don’t have access to the water garden. Use ground fault interrupter outlets for pond pumps and lights and unplug them before entering the pond. Pond
liners can be extremely slippery – take steps to ensure you don’t slip. Use the buddy system – don’t get in the pond unless someone else is present.

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