



The Water Gardener's Year

One of the joys of water gardening is how easily it fits into your regular gardening schedule. In the spring while everything else in the garden is demanding attention, your pond is quietly warming up in preparation for summer. Later in the spring when things have simmered down a bit then you can turn your attention to your annual springtime water garden maintenance. Summer heralds a glorious profusion of rainbow blossoms and lush growth without the onerous tasks of mowing, weeding, and watering. Fall, a breeze here along the Upper Gulf Coast, simply asks that you let the plants prepare for winter on their own. The best water gardening advice for winter? Go inside and relax TV! The following checklist for each season will guide you through each season.

Spring Check List

Spring brings a renewal of spirit and energy to not only to the landscape but ourselves as well.

1. As pond temperatures warm into the upper 50's, start feeding the fish with high carbohydrate/low protein food. Wheat Germ food is a good choice because it is more digestible in cool weather. As the water warms gradually work up to the higher protein foods with color enhancers.
2. Any pots that have overwintered on the bottom of the pond can be raised up on blocks to warmer surface water. Repot any overgrown plants.
3. Begin fertilizing hardy lilies after they have started to grow, divide and repot if needed.
4. Early spring is the time to remove pond waste and leaves if this task was not accomplished last fall. As the pond temperatures begins to raise the pond detritus starts decomposing rapidly releasing nutrients into the water and robbing the pond of oxygen and setting up conditions for more algae growth.
5. Look for flowers one month after leaves have appeared.
6. Check over pumps, lines, and restart filters. Use Water Garden Starter to jump start your pond.
7. Watch for toad eggs and remove them. Too many toad eggs can impact the oxygen levels in your pond especially smaller ponds.
8. Expect more algae as the temps warm up but the pond plants haven't started growing vigorously.
9. Remove filamentous algae by hand or using a notched stick. If green water (unicellular algae) persists consider a filter system or adding more scavengers and submerged plants.
10. Watch for fish ready to spawn. Add a spawning mat, Aquamat, or lots of submerged grasses.
11. When plants are growing vigorously begin fertilizing once a month until temperatures reaches the eighties then fertilize twice a month.
12. Repot your tropical waterlilies in mid-late March to get them ready for a great summer of blooms.

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Summer Check List

The long lazy days of summer bring a profusion of blooms with little work on your part.

1. Top off the pond to replace the water lost from evaporation. (Remember to spray the water into the pond and dechlorinate the water; use a kitchen timer to remind yourself to turn off the water!)
2. Fertilize the lilies and marginal plants every two weeks when the temps are 80°F and higher.
3. Prune decaying leaves and spent blossoms.
4. Feed the fish what they will eat in 3-5 minutes, this can be split into several feedings. Fish are more active in the summer and will benefit from high protein and color enhancing foods.
5. Clean the filter as the pond dictates.
6. Check the submersible pump monthly for debris clogging the impellers.

Autumn Check List

Even as the autumn air chills, pond water stays warm extending bloom well into fall.

1. In the early fall continue feeding your fish with high protein color enhancing foods, but switch to low protein-high carbohydrate foods as winter approaches. Color enhancing foods are not necessary in the fall but won't hurt either.
2. Once the pond water temperatures drop to 50°F discontinue feeding your fish. It's a good idea to purchase additional submerged grasses to give fish grazing material throughout the winter. This allows your fish to eat what they need when they need it during the winter months.
3. Keep lilies well pruned as they produce fewer and fewer leaves, cut back frost killed foliage.
4. Consider a pool cleaning if not necessary remove as much bottom detritus as possible.
5. A Bacteria Activator such as Clarity Max or Water Garden Cleaner helps break down debris in the bottom of the pond and may allow you to skip an annual pond cleaning.
6. After two or three freezes check tropical lilies for tuber production. For Water Gardens in zone 8-9 at this point you have a choice, either leave the plants in the pond where depending on the severity of the winter they may or may not survive or collect the tubers and store them in plastic bags filled with water in a cool spot. -50 F
7. Check pumps for maintenance, in more northern climates remove, clean and store for winter. In the South, raise the pump up so only upper surface water is re-circulating, thus allowing the pond bottom to stay warmer.
8. Remove falling leaves from the pond as soon as possible. Covering your pond with leaf netting for a few weeks is also helpful. If leaf drop gets ahead of you try step #5.
9. In zones 6 and colder, as winter approaches move lilies to deeper portion of pond or to a cool but not freezing protected spot.
10. In Northern areas where a pond may freeze solid, break down the pond by removing lilies and store in a cool but not freezing basement or garage, moving fish to inside tanks and draining pond. Rope off pond to avoid accidents.

Winter Check List

Time for a well deserved rest and dreams of spring.

1. In northern climates remove and clean pump, in the south raise pump up closer to the surface, turn it off during heavy freezes.
2. Some water gardeners have successfully overwintered their pond by building a frame, covering it with clear plastic which is placed over the pond. The greenhouse effect provides enough heat to keep the pond from freezing solid. In many cases ice did not form at all in ponds under these covers.
3. Watch for Water Gardening Workshops at your local Garden Center.

Above all relax and enjoy your water garden!

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