

OUT ON A LIMB

‘Oh, the sight and sound of water’

By: Roger Davis, Landscape Architect
Davis Design Group, Augusta, Georgia

Oh, the sight and sound of water in the garden. The sight and sound relaxes, soothes and is psychological air conditioning in the summer. It can be just an urn bubbling over into a stone bed, the delicate sound of a wall hung fountain, a waterfall cascading into a garden pond, the splashing of a swimming pool or just a reflection pool. I know. A reflection pool doesn't make a sound and if it did there would be no reflection.

To me, walking through the garden where there is a subtle trickle, soothing ripple, a playful splash, a wind blown fountain spray or a rushing cascade makes the garden experience more enjoyable. Just to see a plane of water, breaks up the monotony of paving or grass and imbibes the tranquility that nature brings to a landscape. The increased awareness of making wildlife habitats has brought to the forefront the importance of water in the garden. Colorful fish with their graceful movements are a joy to watch as they are being fed by excited children or grandchildren while the curious household cat looks on. There are many colorful goldfish which are hardier than the prized Japanese koi and a lot less expensive. If you travel a lot in the winter and are concerned about feeding your fish, not to worry, they can survive just fine as their metabolism slows down and they eat very little.

We had a bullfrog that took up residence in our aquascape. He didn't seem to mind us at all until we got too close. He soon became more fun to watch than the fish with those big black eyes peering from near the surface of the water as he snared a passing insect with his tongue. At each visit to the pond, the question was, 'Where is he today' and sometimes you didn't find out until he jumped in. I was never quite ready for that.

Aquatic plants, as with fish, add a dimension not found in the terrestrial world. Water lilies, with their floating pads and glorious shades of cuplike flowers, come in day and night blooming varieties. If you work from dawn to dark, you will miss the flower of the day blooming types of water lily and might want to opt for the night blooming types. Such plants as Louisiana, Virginia, yellow flag iris and calla lilies offer color and give a vertical element to the pond surface. Floating plants such as water hyacinth and water lettuce offer cover and protection for your fin friends. Plants help to shade the water surface keeping it cooler in the summer and also is an algae deterrent. If you have an algae problem in your pond, consider adding more aquatic plants to shade the water surface.

Along with the water and plants comes the associated animal life in the form of water spiders and water darters skating atop the water surface, dragon and mayflies darting above the pond surface and a whole world of under water life below the surface. The closer you look, the more you will discover.

Garden birds will appreciate the water for drinking and bathing as long as that darn cat is not around. Other larger birds such as owls, hawks and herons can be unwelcome guests to the pond side. I've found that they have an appetite for the prettiest fish in the pond while the plain goldfish, won at the County fair, go unmolested.

The sights and sounds of the water are not limited to the trickle, ripple, splash or cascade but can also be found in the croak of a frog, chirp of a bird or exuberant screams of little children as they have fish nibble food from their hands.