

## To Make a Garden Sparkle, Just Add Water

By: Luis Llenza

From tub gardens to fountains, water features inject a dynamic element into the landscape. Adding a water feature to your garden is easier than you may think. This article will discuss the structure itself, and next month, Part II will suggest what to plant in your water garden.

Some factors to consider when planning a water feature include:

- Location – Do you want it close to the house to be enjoyed from the patio? Perhaps you envision a secluded spot for relaxation, reading or bird watching. Make note of electrical outlets for lighting and accessories. Remember that most aquatic plants prefer a sunny spot.
- Size – This will depend on whether your water garden will be a featured accent, such as a wishing well in the rock garden, or the main attraction, such as a koi pond. Plan on a minimum depth of 18 inches for water lilies and goldfish. Larger varieties of plants and fish require more depth.
- Shape – Ponds may be a formal, geometrical shape, patterned after the architecture of the house, or a more casual, amorphous style. The appearance will also be influenced by the surrounding trees, shrubbery and hardscaping.
- Accessories – If you want movement, such as water pouring from a sculpture, you'll need a pump. Take care to select one with enough power to perform the task. For heightened drama after dark, place spotlights under water or in the surrounding landscape—or both.
- Maintenance – Water gardens not only reduce the need for lawn maintenance, they are relatively easy to care for. You'll need to regularly remove leaf and plant debris from the surface. There are accessories available to help clean larger ponds. Prune or separate plants as needed, and, at least once a year, plan to perform a complete clean out.
- Mosquitoes – Well-cared-for water gardens will not encourage growth of mosquito populations. Mosquito larvae are favored by goldfish, and *Gambusia affinis*, a tiny predator known as the mosquito fish. Mosquito Dunks are bacteria tablets that, anchored properly in a water garden, will kill mosquito larvae.

A water garden attracts birds, butterflies and other wildlife. The sounds, reflection, movement and spray of water bathes the senses and draws us back to the garden, again and again for a tranquil retreat and spiritual renewal.

For more details about water gardening, visit the library for how-to books and videos. Here are some Internet sites that offer additional information and resources: [www.watergarten.com](http://www.watergarten.com), the Pond Professor at [www.practical-water-gardens.com](http://www.practical-water-gardens.com), and Van Ness Water Gardens at [www.vnwg.com](http://www.vnwg.com).

## Flowers and Plants for a Water Garden

Floating flowers offset by graceful greenery combine to create a living work of art in the garden. A mix of submerged, marginal and floating plants will work best, whether your space is a small tub or large pond. Use pots for the plants and you will be able to move them easily to vary the setting or to perform maintenance. Here are a few suggestions to get you started, but keep in mind that there are dozens of varieties from which to choose.

*Nymphaea* 'Albert Greenberg' – a tropical waterlily well suited to the South Florida climate. Set pot to allow 12" to 15" of water above the submerged crown of the plant. Flowers project above the leaves floating on the surface. They are cup shaped, 6" to 7" across, with orange-tipped yellow petals that are very fragrant.

*Nymphaea* 'Joey Tomocik' – another popular tropical waterlily that produces deep yellow, fragrant flowers. Like the above specimen, the mature plant, including leaves, will spread out 5' to 7'.

*Iris pseudacorus* – commonly called yellow flag, this marginal plant will be happy along the pond edge in up to 6" of water. Clumps of sword-like leaves and bright flowers make this a showy specimen.

*Acorus calamus* – also known as sweet flag or myrtle flag, is a vigorous marginal that is best contained in a pot to control spread of its sword-shaped leaves. Flowers appear just below the tip of a leaf and are brownish in color. This plant will tolerate partial shade.

*Colocasia esculenta* – also called Black Magic Taro or Aquatic Elephant Ear. Its large, purple-to-blackish heart-shaped leaves make a dramatic contrast when planted next to one of the plants above. Height ranges from 3' to 6' and it does well in shade or partial shade.

*Mimosa strigillosa* – called the sunshine Mimosa for the yellow flowers it sports in summer. The leaves of this creeping plant will close when touched, even by a tropical night breeze.

*Cyperus alternifolius* – the Dwarf Umbrella Palm grows to a height of 18" to 30", creating a definite look of the tropics above the water's surface. Plant in a pot positioned with its top no further than 4 inches below the surface.

Submerged oxygenating plants that will compete with algae for nutrients in the water, thus helping to keep it clean, are a must for every water garden. Choose from the cabomba, elodea and vallisneria species.