



WATER PLANT CARE

Ponds could not be more exciting for the backyard gardener. Flowing water and the excitement of enjoying a balanced aquatic ecosystem is unmatched by traditional gardening. A key piece to pond care includes water plants. The purpose of this flyer is to introduce water plant care to the pond hobbyist.

The "season" for most water plants along the Central Coast is spring. Starting in march, you'll begin to see water plants become available at local nurseries. This is also the time when you'll need to prepare your pond for the coming "push" of growth. This begins with the removal of unwanted "trash" and "rotting" plant material. In some cases some plants will be ready for "dividing." You'll need to prepare for new additions to your pond as well. Thinning out floating plants by removing larger, older material is a good idea; crowded individuals display less flowering and stringy, non-energetic growth.

Feeding your aquatic landscape is the next important step in care and maintenance. Aquatic plants have all the same nutrient requirements as the plants you'll find in your garden. Fortunately quite a bit of nutrients required by water plants are met with ambient water-soluble materials and fish wastes. That said, I encourage every hobbyist to apply fertilizer spikes or "tablet" slow release fertilizers to their plants in the spring.

Its worth touching on pests and disease of water plants as well. Fortunately, water plants don't have nearly the number of problems our landscape plants face. The best solution is to avoid buying or collecting diseased specimens. Inspecting and quarantining new introductions and relying on a reputable dealer is your safest bet.

Fungus problems tend to be the most significant issue facing water plants. There are several "plant dips" and treatments that will help to control fungus. The most common baths incorporate either the strong oxidant, potassium permanganate or aluminum sulfate. Concentrations and instructions for their use are enclosed with their packaging, but basically a solution is prepared and the new plant material emerged for several minutes. The plants are subsequently rinsed and placed. If you do nothing else with new arrivals, be sure to look them over carefully, trim off dead/dying material, scrape away snail and insect eggs and hose off vigorously before putting them in your pond.

When it comes to pests, there are a few to mention. Aphids can be a real challenge given that their piercing and sucking of plants above water (especially lilies) can cause trouble. Watch for the appearance of winged females in the spring when they descend from certain species of nearby trees. If you act quickly, small populations of their offspring may be washed off by a strong blast of water. There some species of flies and beetles that also prey on aquatic plants. In most cases they can be treated by removing the affected parts of the plants.

Fish can also be a problem for water plants. Many folks are recommended to plant directly into planting baskets or in areas where fish cannot nibble at roots and foliage. There are certain varieties of plants that fish will not even touch. Water plants offer a really exciting complement to a pond ecosystem. With the right care, feeding and maintenance, your pond will exceed your wildest dreams and bring years of beauty and enjoyment. For more information, see one of our Pond Professionals here at McShane's.