

GARDENS Four Seasons

GARDENDESIGN - MAY 2016

"I have left almost to the last the magic of water, an element which owing to its changefulness of form & mood & colour & to the vast range of its effects is ever the principal source of landscape beauty, & has like music a mysterious influence over the mind."

- Sir George Sitwell, On the Making of Gardens, 1909

(someday George, someday - I will be able to express myself as eloquently!)

TUB GARDENS

- an entire little ecosystem in a pot!

These little aqua garden gems are a must for anyone who has even the slightest interest in water gardening. Years ago I had a full-fledged pond about 3' x 5'. It came along with all the pleasures like enjoying the goldfish dart about on a sunny day, perfect water lilies in bloom - you know - all the Flora & Fauna associated fun.



Then along came my first Grandbebe & I grew leery of the risks involved with having an open body of H₂O in my back yard. I had heard about creating Water Gardens in a container so I set out to educate myself further. I knew already that if you have the proper balance of fish & plants you could come up with a nice ecosystem where the water stayed clear all Summer.

Out of my desire came my first effort along with a few hard lessons. I would like to share with you everything I learned so if you have the inclination, you too, can have a relaxing, low maintenance water feature in your own yard. With fish (remember you must overwinter them inside) you don't need to worry about mosquito issues - fish will eat anything that lands in the water. In fact, once my tub clears - I rarely feed my goldfish until October. They were so happy last year they spawned! (I *thought* they were a little too frisky some days ;) If you choose to not include fish - you might want to add a small bubbler or spray feature since moving

water discourages mosquito growth. Who knows, maybe it will inspire you to go onto a bigger, better pond experience?



NOTE: It goes without saying that any water deeper than 2” becomes a drowning risk for toddlers. So keep the safety factor in mind when situating your tub garden. Water is a kid magnet particularly when you throw fish into the mix. So if you

have tiny visitors - don't be surprised to discover small toys & unusual objects when you drain the tub come Autumn!

TUB GARDEN INSTRUCTIONS

MATERIALS & SET-UP

- CONTAINER** - min. 2' deep - ideally min.18" across top (2' deep is the depth required to keep goldfish; they need to have that drop to retreat to in extremely hot weather)
- container must be able to hold water (nothing that'll rust or break once filled)
 - if you wish to use a ceramic, wood or metal container - find a plastic liner to fit snugly inside



- I use a very large plastic plant pot for mine. I've plugged the drainage holes with rubber patches secured with aquarium glue. As you can tell - this is the early 'pea soup' stage of the ecosystem

ROCKS - place a layer of clean, fist-sized rocks on the bottom (the rocks allow any debris to settle at the bottom out of reach of the goldfish's tendency to muck around the bottom - thus clouding the water)

PLACEMENT - choose your location carefully, the tub is very heavy once filled !

- place in a location that receives at least 6 hours of full sunlight (this allows for proper growth of the water plants which in turn lets them effectively 'filter' water)
- fill with tap water & add plants



Once you have introduced the plants - let the tub garden sit for 2 weeks before adding fish. (this allows chlorine to dissipate & the ph level to stabilize) Alternately you could use Tetra brand Aquasafe - it dechlorinates & conditions the water almost immediately.

After about 3 days, the water will initially become cloudy - kinda like green pea soup. Closer to the 2 week mark, you'll notice a gradual clearing. About 3 or 4 days later, you should be able to see down to the bottom of your tub garden....it is like a miracle I swear! Introduce 1 - 6 goldfish - under 2" in length & enjoy. You may wish to add larger fish, just ensure you don't upset the ecosystem balance by adding too many or too large a fish. (too many fish & the plants will not be able to keep up with filtering their waste)



WATER PLANT CHOICES

Plant selection is critical to the success of your new tub garden. You will need plants that excel at filtering the debris as well as adding oxygen. Ideally you will need 60% of the surface of the water covered with foliage or floating plants. This not only allows enough plant filtering action but gives the fish a shady place to retreat to. I suggest to pick at least 3 types of plants. Try to have at least one upright, one floating & one submerged. Aquatic Plants can be sourced at any of the larger nurseries in town. The following selections are common & readily available:

Submerged Plants

Hornswort has long 'ropes' of fluffy foliage. It can be anchored to the bottom or allowed to float freely.

Parrot's Feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*) is stunning with its long, graceful, delicate strands of foliage growing out of a submerged potted root.

Floating Plants

Water Hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) is a very popular floating plant. Its long trailing roots & floating foliage clusters with spikes of pale lavender flowers are very attractive.

Water lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*) has roots that are like those of the water hyacinth. It has velvety blue-green leaves forming a rosette of foliage similar to leaf lettuce.

Duckweed (*Lemna* species) is a very small, 3-leaved plant that spreads rapidly. If it starts to take over the aquatic garden, it can simply be dipped out of the tub.

Dwarf or Pygmy varieties of Water Lilies with their roots potted & submerged.

Upright Plants (that grow boldly out of the water)

Umbrella palms (*Cyperus alternifolius*) have tropical-like foliage & grow to 2' high.

Iris are great as accent plants. **Iris versicolor** or **Iris pseudacorus** are good choices. They grown 2' - 4' high with sword shaped leaves that resemble cattails or bullrushes.

Water Calla Lilies (*Calla palustris*) have huge fan-like leaves with scented, white calla lilies - incredible as a 'water filter' but also very striking flowers



MAINTENANCE

- feeding your fish is optional (they feed off mosquito larvae, bugs & algae as well as the plants themselves)
- you can 'train' your fish to come when you feed them by tapping on the side of the tub before you drop in the floating pellets (best food for tub gardens) After a week or so of daily feeding in this manner, they should respond to your taps with hungry mouths at the surface.
- top up with tap water as required (up to 1/8 of the existing water level can be topped up with chlorinated water as the existing water will blend it until the plants filter it out. Any more than that should have the chlorine removed with the aforementioned Aquasafe)
- remove immediately any leaves, seeds or unused fish food to assist the ecosystem in keeping the water clear.



As always, I have even more pictures on my Pinterest site - check out Stock Tanks, Rubbermaid Tubs, Rain Barrels or even old Hot Tubs as Aquatic Garden applications.....

<https://www.pinterest.com/gardens4seasons/boards/>





The Prairie Planter

Shelly Dewaal, friend & colleague, has been working her magic in Saskatoon & area yards over the past 11 years. Anyone who'd like help with yard maintenance & plant installations from a knowledgeable, experienced & energetic gal - simply contact Shelly - Ph. #306-880-0555
or email shellyd.planter@gmail.com Website - www.prairieplanter.com



- just one sample of her masterpieces - as you can tell she knows her stuff & then some!

UPCOMING EVENTS

June 3, 2016 - U of S ANNUAL PLANT SALE - a perfect time to purchase local nursery grown fruits & shrubs at low prices. Click on this link for location, hours & selections - <http://www.fruit.usask.ca/extension.html>

DESIGN BRILLIANCE

Look what I found ! BRILLIANT up-cycling of a telephone booth in Japan - the ULTIMATE Tub Garden!



PLANT OF THE MONTH

THUNDERCHILD FLOWERING CRABAPPLE (Malus x 'Thunderchild')



I get a lot of inquires on this stunner - you will notice it in bloom everywhere right about now. A beautiful upright, cloud shaped tree that tops out at about 25'-30' with about a 12' spread. It is extremely hardy & easy to establish. Dusty burgundy leaves are sharp contrast to any other foliage & it makes them that much more striking. I prefer to treat them as a 'Specimen Tree' standing alone instead of a grouping. The dark pink blooms turn into reddish mini-crabapples that birds love. Keep that in mind when situating one - since the dropping fruit can be a nuisance near walkways, decks or patios. Winter interest is phenomenal as it is for most Crabapples - cool, twisty branches & roughly barked trunks allow for Jack Frost to really create a show.



Planning a Celebration in your Yard this Summer?

The **GARDENDESIGN Back Issue on Backyard Landscape Ideas to host a *WEDDING* or *GRADUATION*** might just inspire you.

Simply reply to this email with ***WEDDING* or *GRADUATION*** in the subject line & enjoy to your heart's content.



Looking forward to JUNE'S GARDENDESIGN ?

Well, you should be!

We'll look at other ways to enjoy **WATER IN YOUR GARDEN**

DID YOU KNOW? - I never, Ever, EVER share my email list - EVER! :)

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