

WATER GARDENING

Tips on Balancing Your Pond

For your pond to be a healthy, stable ecosystem, a balance must be achieved between plants and fish. Since the pond is exposed to sunlight and nutrients, algae will grow. Algae are beneficial in that they give off oxygen, but an overabundance can make the water soupy and green.

To balance your pond and keep algae under control without chemicals, the following steps should be taken:

1. SHADE THE WATER SURFACE

Sunlight causes that 'pea soup' green algae to grow. Shading the surface with 50%-70% of the pond surface with floating aquatic plants such as water lilies and their relatives, water hyacinth, water lettuce, azolla, water poppy, etc...

2. ADD OXYGENATING PLANTS

These submerged plants are useful in maintaining proper balance. They add oxygen to the water and serve as a filter by absorbing dissolved nutrients and thus compete with the algae. They also serve as a green food source, spawning mat and a hiding place for fish. The general rule for the amount of oxygenating plants to add to the pond is one bunch (about 3 springs) for every 2-3 surface square feet

3. ADDING BOG OR MARGINAL PLANTS

These plants not only add another dimension to your pond, but also absorb excess nutrients in the water. There are many choices of leaf shape, color, texture and size as well as many flowering plants. Keep in mind, when designing for smaller pool, that many of the bog plants get very large. Choose smaller scale plants that won't eventually choke out the pond.

4. ADD FISH GRADUALLY

After your newly filled pond has stood for a few days to allow ammonia and chloramine to dissipate, it's time to add fish. You may also quicken the process by using a commercial chloramine remover. Start by adding only a couple of fish. Adding too many fish at one time can throw the balance off. Wait 2 to 3 weeks before adding more fish. The general rule is to have one inch of fish for every surface square foot keeping in mind the eventual mature size of the fish. Too many fish produce more waste than can be used by the plants as nutrients and promotes excess algae growth. If filtration is being used, you may keep more fish.

5. DON'T OVERFEED FISH

Overfeeding simply adds more nutrients to the water. Uneaten food will promote algae growth.

6. FILTRATION

Though it is possible to achieve a balanced pond without it, circulation, aeration, and filtration in the pond can help establish the balance, especially in larger ponds over 300 gallons. Air is needed by the fish and helps break down harmful chemicals. Filter materials provide a growth medium for beneficial nitrogen-processing bacteria and remove potentially harmful elements that can cloud pond water and kill fish.

7. PATIENCE

It will usually take a pond several weeks to several months to establish and become a healthy, stable eco-system. Be patient and your pond will reward you with many years of enjoyment.