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*The Dazzling World of
Stained Glass*

Winterizing Your Pond



Koi Fish

and other pond cleaning tools. Then, add a bacterial enzyme while the water is still warm to break down the smaller debris and the sludge that you can't get out. Local pond supply stores carry this enzyme additive. Smaller debris can also clog filters during the winter and make the pumps more prone to freezing.

It is best to complete the debris removal prior to the water reaching 50 degrees F. After the water crosses that temperature threshold, add a Fall/Winter preparation that contains bacteria that work well in cold water. This will help keep the nitrogen cycle (waste removal process) going throughout the winter, albeit much slower than during the warmer months.

Once the pond has been cleaned out, place a pond net across the top to prevent more leaves and twigs from making it back in during the fall season. Your local pond retailer should have these in stock. Be sure to keep the net out of the water so the fish cannot get tangled, and do not permit any dips in the net because leaves will pool there and drag the net further down. Also, be sure to check your skimmer net more frequently as leaves are very sneaky critters that have a tendency to find their way into ponds even with the best laid plans for pond netting. Don't forget to leave small openings in your pond net if you have frogs that visit the pond so that they may continue to come and go.

Plant Winterization

Preparing plants for winter is very straightforward. As they begin to turn brown, pond plants are starting to go dormant for the winter. Trim back and remove all dead leaves to help reduce the amount of organic debris in the pond. The less organic material that is present in your pond, the fewer problems you will have with algae in the spring.

Hardy bog plants and marginals need to be trimmed back to approximately 2" to 3". If they have been planted in pots, submerge them deep into the pond. This will help to protect them by insulating them from cold. If you have bog plants that cannot be

By Shannon Goins

moved easily, you may opt to cover them with barley straw from a local pond store. If the barley straw blows into the pond, it should not cause a problem, since it is frequently used in ponds as a natural algae treatment method.

Caring for Your Fish During the Winter

One of the most common questions about pond winterization is what to do with the fish when it gets cold. While koi are tolerant of very cold temperatures and can easily withstand Arkansas winters, some fancy goldfish and all algae eating fish must be brought inside during the cold months.

It is a common belief that koi should be fed a wheat germ based diet



Refined Photography

Shannon Goins is a co-owner of NorthSide Aquatics, located on Counts Massie Rd. in Maumelle. She specializes in filtration and water quality management. Shannon welcomes everyone to stop in and see the new greenhouse water garden area at NorthSide Aquatics and join them on Facebook for the latest store updates.

during fall and spring. However, this is not the best option. It is true that koi metabolism slows down as the temperature falls and they are no longer able to digest many ingredients found in lower quality foods. Wheat germ is one of these ingredients that cannot be digested. It is passed through the fish and is deposited as waste in the pond.

As was previously mentioned, the more organic waste left in the pond over winter, the worse the algae will be in the spring. By feeding koi a high quality, highly digestible diet that mimics their natural food, it is possible to keep them well fed through fall and spring without adding unnecessary waste to the pond ecosystem. A good pond retailer will carry these higher-quality foods.

Feeding should be slowed as the water temperature begins to drop, and eventually stopped once the water reaches 50 degrees Fahrenheit. You can best track how to feed in the fall by obtaining a feeding thermometer from your local pond supply store. Continuing to feed throughout the winter can kill fish. High levels of toxic ammonia are caused by decomposing uneaten food and fish waste. In cold weather, bacteria that would normally process this waste are dormant.

Remember that fish will often come up to eat during the colder months if they are offered food. This is more of a behavior to please their caretakers rather than because they are hungry. Keep in mind that their digestive systems do not do well with food in them during the cold months. Food can rot in the gut and lead to serious intestinal problems.

To Run, Or Not to Run

Arkansas' tricky winter climate makes straightforward advice on whether or not to run pumps throughout the season a bit of a dilemma. As a general rule, ponds in central Arkansas should continue to run their pumps throughout the winter. There are, however, some special circumstances that should be taken into consideration for certain ponds.

By keeping the pond going while the weather is cold, fish are getting well oxygenated water. Additionally, the beneficial bacteria that live in the filters and provide waste filtration during the summer months are kept alive in a dormant state. So, if it is feasible to do this with a pond, it is the preferred strategy during the winter.

One reason that you might not want to run your pump during winter is that severe freezing can damage the pump by cracking the casing. While this is unlikely in our climate, we do periodically have severe weather such as ice storms which can cut the electrical power for several days, allowing time for a pump to freeze.

A second reason not to run a pond pump is that if a waterfall is present, ice can form on the sides of the waterfall and divert the water flow out of the pond. Generally, keeping a close eye on the water level is a sufficient way to monitor this potential problem.

Smaller and shallower ponds deserve special consideration because many of them only have a single fountain style pump which pulls water from the deeper, warmer areas of the pond. This water is then pumped out into the cold air, chilling it, before returning it to the pond. Running these types of fountain-style pumps lowers the overall temperature of the pond, so they should be shut off or modified so that they run horizontally rather than vertically. Pumps should be used only in shallow areas and not mix the cooler water from the shallow areas with the deeper, warmer waters.

Deciding whether or not to run

your pond over the winter should be an individual decision based on your particular type of setup and good information to help you make that decision. Remember, if you decide not to run your pond pump over the winter, put the pump in a bucket of water in the garage where it cannot freeze. This ensures that the seals in the pump stay wet and pliable. Neglecting this important step can cause the seals to dry out and crack, leading to leaks in the spring.

A Frozen Pond?

Frozen ponds are not a common occurrence in Arkansas. However, some winters can be particularly cold and produce ice storms during which the outside temperatures may be extremely cold for several weeks. If the temperatures remain low enough for an extended period of time, a pond that is not running may freeze on top. In such situations, fish are deprived of oxygen and may die.

The ideal way to prevent this type of situation is to have a pond heater already in place. A pond heater is not designed to heat the entire pond; rather, it heats the water immediately around it to keep it from freezing. In

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It's that time of year again when you can walk through three different holiday seasons at your local major retail store in a matter of only a few aisles. Like a big flashing neon sign, this is the signal to every pond owner to begin the process of winterizing the back yard pond.

The correct steps in winterizing a pond depend on a number of factors: Is the pond planted? Are there fish in the pond – if so, what kind? Is there a waterfall? While there are several variables, the process is simple. Winterization should be considered a standard annual practice in pond ownership. When done properly, it simplifies the process in opening the pond for spring.

General Guidelines

Let's start with general preparation that applies to all ponds. Debris removal is the number one priority in winterization. Getting rid of twigs and leaves that have found their way into your pond over the last few months is not just an aesthetic endeavor – it makes your pond easier to start up in the spring by limiting the amount of existing nutrients that would feed algae, and it makes it safe for your fish over the long winter months. Debris left in your pond will decompose during the winter, constantly releasing noxious hydrogen sulfide gas which robs the fish of the oxygen rich environment that they need.

Fall cleaning should be thorough, but it is not an attempt to create a sterile environment. Get out large debris that you can remove with a net



Frozen Waterfall



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open recalcitrant bottles.

Pointer #10 (the most important pointer of all, memorize this one): You, as the host/hostess, are the perceived wine expert. You could likely serve your best wine in the antique snuff glasses you inherited from your Grandmother without raising eyebrows. No matter what you do, what wine you serve or how you match it with food, your guests will almost invariably conclude that you have special knowledge not available to them and will not point out your mistakes. Even if they know you are off on a tangent, they probably won't mention it. If they do make an issue of it, simply smile, nod your head and change the subject. (A most positive sign: they ask where they can get antique snuff glasses like your Grandmother's).

Finally, keep in mind this all-important fact (which will negate almost any mistake you make in matching wine and food): you are offering your guests not just food and wine. You are offering them your hospitality, and that hospitality includes friendship, well-being, comfort, and a myriad of warm, comfortable, happy interactions. Your guests can do no better than to recognize and show appreciation for that hospitality. ❀

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so doing, the pond heater essentially creates a hole in the ice through which oxygen may pass to the fish.

Should your pond ever freeze across the top, never break the ice by pounding on it. Breaking the ice by force can cause shock waves that may result in fatal internal injuries to your fish. Alternatively, you may boil a pot of water and then set the pot on top of the ice to melt a hole through it. This is a safe and easy method to ensure your fish get plenty of oxygen during a nasty cold spell.

Pond winterization is an important step in preparing for a beautiful spring pond. Removing existing debris, preventing more debris from accumulating, reducing fish waste, and by making certain the pond remains oxygenated, we can ensure that our ponds will stay healthy over the winter. When the temperatures begin to climb again, sometime between the red heart shaped boxes of chocolates and the pastel colored eggs on the shelves of our large local retailers, it will be time to look to our ponds for signs of life once again. ❀

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