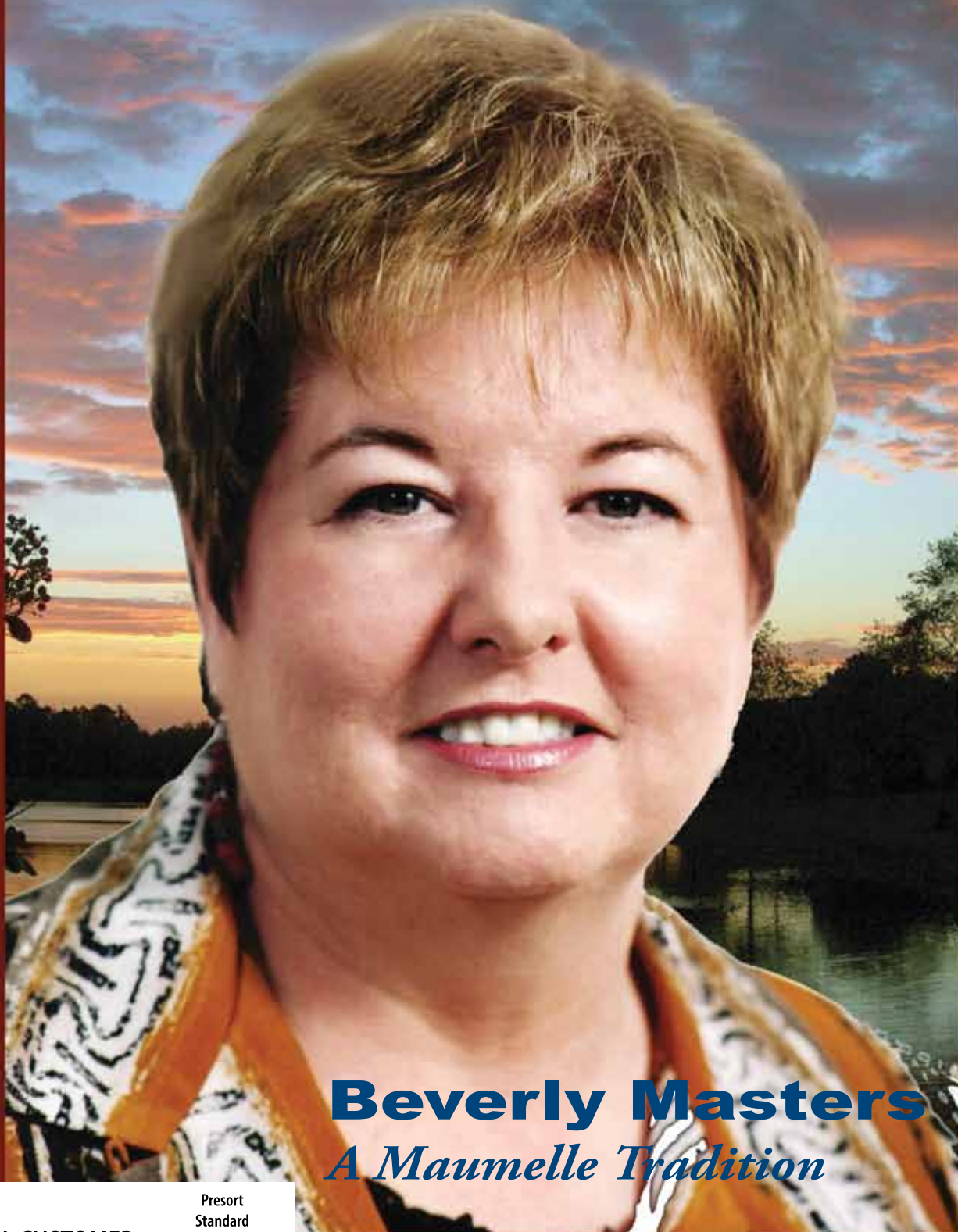


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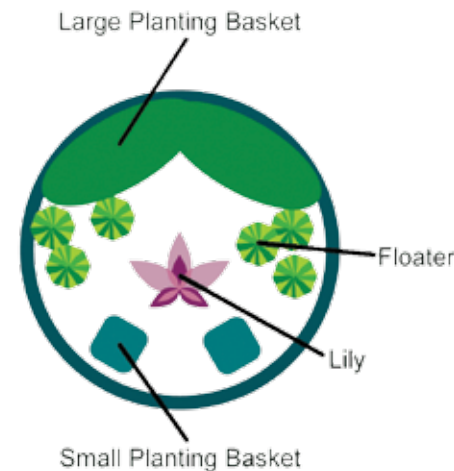
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# I'd Love to Have a Pond, but...

By Ginny Heisler

How many times have you heard yourself saying those words? You've thought about water gardening, drooled over pictures in magazines, and maybe even drifted through the water garden section of your favorite local pond store. Either the time involved, the space required, or the rocks that are waiting for you just under the surface of your lawn have scared you away from having the garden oasis of blooming tropical plants.

Luckily, you can have the water garden of your dreams with a Container Water Garden. You don't have to have a pond to enjoy aquatic plants, you don't need a lot of space, and you don't need a lot of time. You don't even have to tackle that rock quarry in your back yard. All you need are a few aquatic plants, a little planning, and the waterproof container of your choice.



## Planning Your Project

Before you head to the pond supply store to pick up some containers and a trunk load of plants, take a few minutes to plan your project. A well planned project not only will save you time and money, but it will also prevent the frustration of having more plants than you have room in the container. If planning isn't your strong suit, your local aquatic garden supplier will have some easy, do-it-yourself kits and knowledgeable staff on hand to help you. Having an idea of what you want, however, will keep you on track and ensure your water gardening success.

The first step in planning your Container Water Garden is to choose the proper location. Blooming aquatic plants require at least 6 hours of sunlight every day, so look for a spot on your patio that gets good sun-

light. Falling leaves can cause problems with water quality, and although they can't be completely avoided, you don't want to invite more work by placing the container under hanging tree branches. Make sure the location is level and can support the weight of the container when it is completely full of water. Most importantly, choose a location where you can enjoy your Container Water Garden—perhaps close to your favorite reading spot or where you drink your morning coffee.

The second step is to find the perfect container. Luckily, the possibilities are endless. There are commercially available containers designed just for water gardens, but any container that is waterproof and able to support the weight of the water will work. If you find a container that you absolutely love and it isn't water tight, don't give up on it. With just a few extra steps any container can be made suitable for water gardening. Some things you may consider using are: whiskey barrels, ceramic or clay basins, window box planters, old bathtubs, kiddie pools, or a wooden box that you make yourself. If your container is not naturally water tight, simply hide a plastic basin inside. The possibilities are limited only by your creativity. Whatever you decide, stop by your favorite pond supply store for supplies and instructions on waterproofing the container.

The next step in the planning process is to choose your plants. This is the part of the process where it is important to remember that you are planning a small ecosystem. Container Water Gardens, just like any other aquatic garden, need a variety of plants to maintain a balanced system. In addition to the beauty they provide, aquatic plants serve to oxygenate the water, control algae, and give shade and hiding places to the container's inhabitants. Plants come in four varieties each of which provides a special function.

**Marginal Plants**, or emergent plants, are planted in baskets that are placed 3-6 inches under the surface of the water. The easiest way to incorporate marginal plants is to plant them in a basket in groups of one tall plant and two or three shorter plants. You can either support the basket from underneath with a few bricks, or you can get a basket hanger from your local pond retailer. Be sure to use an aquatic planting media, so as not to add toxins to the water or encourage algae growth. The purpose of the marginal plant is largely to add shape and interest to your Container Water Garden, but they also remove nutrients from the water which helps to control algae and keep the water clear. Some common marginal plants include cattails, zebra rush, canas, pitcher plants, dwarf papyrus, and creeping jenny.

**Water Lilies** are almost a "must have" in any Container Water Garden. Their blooms are strikingly gorgeous, and they have beautiful leaves which provide shade and safety for small fish. The shade they provide also helps to regulate the temperature of the water in the container on hot summer days. When adding your water lily, be sure the leaves are not submerged. The leaves should float on top of the water, so you might need to place a brick underneath it if necessary until the lily has grown.

**Oxygenators** provide oxygen for fish by photosynthesizing underwater. They also help to control the growth of algae and the dreaded pea soup "green water" common to water gardens. Just remove the lead weight that binds the individual plants together in a bunch, and submerge the plants in the water, or allow them to free float. If they become overgrown, simply cut them back and dispose of the excess in the garbage. Do not remove all of the oxygenators at once as this will deprive the fish of oxygen and possibly trigger an algae bloom. Commonly available oxygenators are anacharis, hornwort, parrot's feather, and cabomba.



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terfalls require a power supply, and fish will need to be brought indoors over the winter. There are as many things to consider as there are options. Depend on the expert advice of your local pond retailer in this decision making process.

## Pest and Insect Control:

Let's face it, we live in Arkansas and bugs don't just reproduce here - they procreate at an unimaginable rate and they must be prevented both aggressively and responsibly. Be careful not to use an insecticide in your aquatic garden that will harm the environment and rid your yard of good insects, like bees. Likewise, don't allow your garden oasis to become a romantic getaway for the neighborhood mosquitoes and aphids either.

The best way to prevent mosquitoes is to add small fish to your Container Water Garden. White cloud fish, mosquito fish, or other small hardy fish make excellent mosquito predators, because they eat the mosquito larvae before they can mature. If you don't want to add fish, water circulation from a small inexpensive pump will prevent mosquitoes from using your aquatic garden as a breeding site. If neither is a good option, bacillus thuringiensis, an environmentally safe bacterial additive, is readily available at most pond centers and will kill mosquitoes and their larvae without harming bees or the environment. Aphids can be removed with an all natural aphid control spray, also available in most pond centers. Make sure any prevention used will not harm children or pets. Check with your local pond supply retailer for more information.

## Putting it all together:

You've chosen a container, picked out your plants, and decided on the final touches. The only thing you have left to do is put it all together. Now is the time to check your shopping list to ensure that you haven't left anything out. Here's what you'll need:

- Container
- Waterproofing Supplies
- Composite Shims (to level the container)
- Planting Basket and Hangers (or bricks for support)
- Aquatic Planting Media (small clay pebbles, not soil)
- Plants
- Pump for Waterfall/Spitter (optional)
- Dechlorinator (required if adding fish)
- Mosquito and Aphid Control (be sure it's environmentally safe)
- Fish (should be added a few days after plants)
- Fish Food

Then, just follow a few easy steps to create your Container Water Garden:

- Place the container where you want it, using shims to level it.

- Plant the marginal plants in the basket with the aquatic planting media.
- Hang the basket on the back side of the container (or use bricks for support).
- Fill the container with water just to the top of the plant basket.
- Add dechlorinator to make the water safe for the fish.
- Drop in a Water Lily, Oxygenators, and Floaters.
- Wait three to four days, and add fish.

## Maintaining Your Container Water Garden

You've got it in place, it's beautiful, and your plants are filling in nicely. Now is the time to sit back and enjoy the garden oasis that you have created. You will have to spend a few minutes every few days maintaining your Container Water Garden but don't worry, you won't spend much time with your hands wet. Keep the plants pruned of any dead or dying leaves, replace water loss from evaporation (be sure to dechlorinate the new water if you have fish), and cut back any overgrown oxygenators. If you have fish, you will need to drop in a couple of flakes of fish food every few days. The most important thing to remember is to pull up a chair and enjoy the masterpiece you have created.

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