

Ponder It Well!

by Robert Auger

At its last meeting, on Monday 18 February, the Russell & District Horticultural Society (RDHS) strayed from its usual heartland – annuals, perennials and shrubs – to explore the classic ornament of the residential environment – the garden pond. The talk of the evening was given by Darrell Kekanovich, retail manager at Ritchie Feed & Seed who gave the audience advice on how to install your own pond.

Darrell's main message was that the installation of a pond required a lot of careful planning. While, he said, there is no right way or wrong way to set up a pond, often the new pond owner wants to rip it out the moment she or he starts operating it. So planning for a pond is critical. First, you have to be sure why you want a pond. Is to hear the noise of the water trickling down boulders? Is it to have fish to look at? Or is it a place around which children or grandchildren will want to play?

Site selection is also an important consideration. The pond should be located so that it will be possible to connect its pump directly to a GFI electrical outlet. Most pumps come with a 20 foot electrical cord (he advised against using an extension cord as it would force the pump to overwork and would wear out faster). If you want to see or 'hear' the pond from inside the house it shouldn't be at the far end of the yard.

In order to get a feel for how the pond would fit in with the natural flow of your yard or patio, you should draw a sketch of your garden with the pond and then trace its outline right on the grounds using a garden hose to experiment with different shapes. Size is another factor, as is of course total cost. Darrell said that a 4 by 6 foot pond kit costs about \$1,000 but one for an 8 by 11 pond costs only \$150 more. As most pond owners wish they had built a larger pond, it makes sense to go as large as you can afford and will fit in your yard.

Before arriving at a final decision you should consult catalogues, read up on ponds and visit water gardens that others have installed. Don't

be shy to ask current pond owners about how they feel about their own ponds.

In the second part of his presentation, Darrell commented on the different elements that come together in a residential pond. For the proper aeration and oxygenation of the water, a pump is necessary to recycle the water every hour. Choice of a particular pump depends on the volume of water and the height of the fountain (specifications as to volume and height are usually provided on the pump's box). Ponds are micro ecosystems where everything must be kept in balance to function well. Not enough recycling and algae will appear. Organic debris must be filtered out with the help of a skimmer or converted through bacteria that should be added to the water annually.

A good, strong liner is essential. Darrell recommended a top grade 45 mil rubber liner (as opposed to a PVC one) with an underlay of 2 inches of sand or a no longer used carpet. The underlay will protect the liner from tears produced by existing or emerging stones.

Plants are useful to cover the water surface from the direct sunlight and to oxygenate the water. They also play in role in reducing the level of nitrates and ammonia that generate algae. Some plants can over-winter. Water lilies should be sunk to the bottom of the pond and will re-surface in the summer. Canadian water irises and other perennials can just be transplanted in the garden in the fall. It is not worth the bother trying to keep water hyacinths or water lettuces.

Fish are a good addition because they eat algae and mosquitoes. However, they should not be over-fed (either don't feed them at all or at most once every three days) or they will produce more organic matter that then turns to algae.

Several questions were asked following the presentation. These had to do with getting raccoons away from the pond, eliminating bulrushes and the causes of a sudden or gradual lowering of the water level.