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Water features add a lot of interest to a home landscape. Whether you create a container water garden or a large waterfall, adding water to a landscape is easy to do. They are an attractive addition to the landscape and not as difficult as you may think to maintain.

You don't have to build Niagara Falls in the backyard to have a waterfall. There are kits for water gardens for containers all the way up to larger full-scaled waterfalls and ponds. Size should not be a limiting factor.

The sound of water enhances any landscape. Even the small trickle from a fountain can help to mask out other sounds. Flowing water has a special fascination and soothing effect.

Where do you start? Education should be your first step. Don't rush out and start buying liners, filters and pumps and then decide what to do with them. A water garden has its own eco-system. Knowledge of the necessary balance, maintenance and costs involved can help you choose the right system for your yard.

Planning is important for both budget and time for maintenance. A custom built water garden, complete with filter system can start at \$1700 and go as high as you want. If you are a do-it-yourselfer, you can buy all the necessary equipment, but again, knowledge is needed beforehand. You can also add the sound of water with a fountain or container water feature. Too many jump in and start putting in gardens and water features, and then end up with a mess because they didn't have any understanding of what is required.

Location of a water garden is an important step in maintenance. Full sun is an ideal location away from falling debris from trees--both pollen in the spring and falling leaves in the fall. Yet heating of the water can be a concern in the summer. The minimum depth of water to prevent overheating should be 2 1/2 feet. Water gardens can be in the shade, and many people like the added cooling effect of water and shade, but there will be more maintenance involved.

Decide on the size and shape of your garden. Decide on what type of liner you are going to choose. Your options include: rigid formed plastic, 20 mil vinyl sheets, 45 mil butyl sheets, fiberglass and concrete. There are pros and cons for all types.

Once you choose your liner type and location, decide on how you are going to keep the pond in balance. You can do it with a mix of plants and fish, but it will take a while for the system to get regulated and have clear water. Plants can die or multiply too rapidly. If you want an instant pond with clear water you need to install a filter system with your water garden.

Filter systems may include a filter, ultraviolet light to destroy algae, and a biological media. Although it does raise the cost of the water garden by up to 40%, it gives you a healthy environment for fish and plants, and gives you crystal clear water year-round. The bane of any gardener with a water garden is a pea-soup pond.

Many people are adding water gardens for the musical sound of running water, and the beauty of it. Running water will help to keep mosquitos at bay, but so will fish.

One of the most popular fish is koi, the ornamental Japanese carp. They range in color from solids to speckled, in shades of orange, white, lemons and blues. The lifespan on record is 200 years, but they average 15 years. They will grow to be 24 to 30 inches in length. Smaller ponds can use goldfish. They will even grow in a small whiskey barrel garden on the back deck. Both of these fish overwinter fine.

If animals are killing your fish there are a few precautions you can take. Cats can be deterred by keeping the water level six to eight inches below the top level of your pond. Having plant cover will also give them a place to hide from attackers. Raccoons and some birds may be almost impossible to deter, since they can get right into the water with the fish.

Water gardening is also a way to allow you to grow some wonderful and unique plants. Some are winter hardy and others must be removed and stored for winter protection. Water lilies come in both forms--hardy and tropical. They must have submerged root stocks, while the leaves and flowers float on the surface. They have beautiful flowers. Other plants float on the surface. There are yet others which can be planted around the perimeter of your garden in wet, boggy places, including several irises, cannas and marsh marigolds. Lotus plants have outstanding flowers and produce great dried seed pods. Many of the local nurseries are now stocking water garden plants and supplies.

Availability of plants, liners, filters and fountains is a good indicator of how popular water gardening has become. Water gardening whether large or small can be a fun and rewarding hobby. Take time to learn some of the basic aspects of it before you jump in and start building.