



# Designing Your Water Feature

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Designing your water feature is a crucial first step that you don't want to overlook. It's important to first survey the site where you are designing your pond. You should notice a number of things, the location of the viewing area, the lay of the land as well as the existing landscaping. As you stand there taking it all in, ideas will come and go and you will visualize many different options. In the end, however, one design usually stands out in your thoughts as the ideal water feature for the setting.

The style of the pond can vary between formal and informal. Formal gardens are often symmetrical with straight lines. They need to be maintained regularly to look their best, and on average there are a lot fewer formal gardens around. Informal is the most popular. They are natural water gardens that seem to fit into any landscape.

## LOCATION

Location and size are the two most important and unfortunately, misunderstood aspects of pond design. The water feature needs to be brought up close and personal to the home. Place your water feature where you can enjoy it. You should be able to enjoy your pond from inside and outside of your home. Try to face the waterfalls toward the house; that way it is not only visible from the living area, but the sound it creates will echo through the home. When a pond can be seen and heard from the home, its enjoyment is increased dramatically.

Putting the pond in the far corner of your property is not a good location. It's very hard to enjoy your pond if it's too far away. Low spots should be avoided because run-off water can pollute a pond and construction is often complicated because wet, muddy soil is hard to work with. These are two of the worst locations to build a pond.

## SIZE

The size of the pond is crucial to its overall impact on the landscape and your pleasure. Building a pond too small is the biggest complaint from pond owners. No one complains if the pond is too big. What most future pond owners don't realize is, the addictive nature of water gardening. Pond sizes can vary to as small as 4' x 6' to as big as an acre or more. The ideal pond size is around 11' x 16'.

When designing multiple ponds to step down into each other, do not make the design top heavy where the bottom most water feature is smaller than everything above it. Think of an upside down pyramid. The easiest way to figure out if your water feature is top heavy is to take your square footage of everything above the bottom pond and add it together. If it is bigger than the square footage of the bottom pond, then it is top-heavy. A top-heavy design will result in the overflowing of the lower pond if the power goes off for any reason. Utilizing the overflow option on the back of the skimmer will keep the pond itself from overflowing (no fish floating in the yard), but when you go to turn the pump back on, there will not be a sufficient amount of water to refill the falls and stream.

An easy remedy is to make the bottom pond bigger, NOT deeper. It is a common misconception that digging the pond deeper will take care of the problem. This doesn't work for two reasons. First, unless you plan on leaving the pond partially drained with an exposed 6" rock wall, it won't work, since the pond is normally filled within 2" of the edge, no matter how deep it is. Second, if you're using a skimmer, the water level has to be within 2" of the edge of the pond, or else the pump will be damaged by sucking dry because the water level is too low.

Larger bodies of water are easier to keep in balance than smaller ones. Climate changes, chemicals, or even over-feeding of the fish affect smaller ponds much more rapidly. The more water you have as a buffer, the easier it becomes to balance a pond.

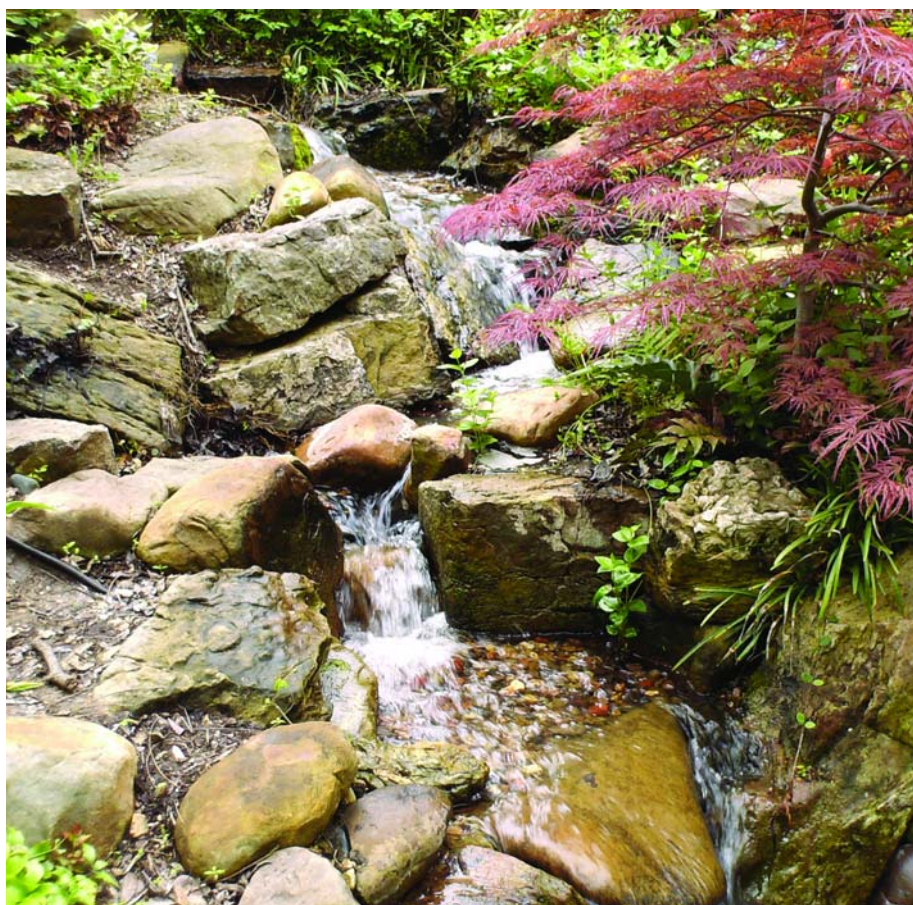
When it comes to the cost of the pond, it's better to do it right the first time! If you want to make a perennial garden three feet bigger, you take out a shovel and turn over the ground. If you want to do the same thing with a pond, you have to rip it all out and start over! The latter involves considerably more work and expense.

## **BERM**

One of the most overlooked and often improperly constructed elements of a good pond design is the surrounding landscaped berm. All the excavated dirt from the pond should be kept on site and used as the base of the waterfalls and the terrestrial plantings. Done correctly, the berm will blend the pond seamlessly into the setting. Done incorrectly, the berm will make the pond look contrived and unnatural.

The first thing you need to understand about the berm is its function in the design. The berm will serve as a backdrop to the entire water feature. Ponds form naturally in low, recessed areas. By creating a berm you can accomplish this same look. The pond appears to have formed naturally in front of the berm. Secondly, the berm becomes the base of the waterfall. It is for this reason that you need to scale the berm to the pond size.

The most common mistake is to build a berm too high and narrow next to the edge of a pond. Future pond owners often say they want high waterfalls, but what often occurs is a waterfall that looks like a volcano spewing lava.



A good rule of thumb is to build the berm only as high as the pond is deep. Since most ponds are around two feet deep, that means most waterfalls should only be two feet high. The more you build the berm to the scale of the pond, the more natural your water feature will become.

Making a water feature overly complicated is the root of most problems. Keep your design simple, work with nature instead of against it, and don't cut corners!