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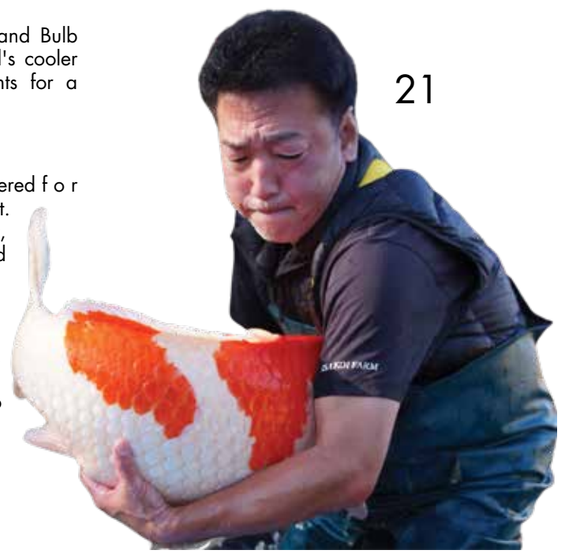
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2025

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New Jersey Convention Center
Edison, NJ
www.aquashella.com

September 22 - 24
South Carolina Koi & Goldfish Show
Kentucky Exposition Center
Simpsonville, Kentucky

September 27 - 28
Fresno Koi Show
Kentucky Exposition Center
Woodward Park-Group Activity Area
Fresno, California
www.cencalkoi.com

October 1 - 3
Utahmonium
Daniels Summit Lodge
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www.aquascapeinc.com

October 22 - 24
Hardscapes North America
Kentucky Exposition Center
Louisville, Kentucky
www.hardscapena.com

November 9 - 13
Mid-South Ponds Retreat
Statnon, TN
www.midsouthpondretreat.com

November 5 - 7
Atlantic-Oase
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Cleveland, Ohio
www.atlantic-oase.com

2026

March 11 - 13
Water Garden Expo
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Publisher's Perspective

In Awe of *Autumn*



As the first cool breezes roll in and the leaves begin their slow transformation, our industry enters one of its most vibrant and inspiring seasons. Fall may be the time when ponds start their seasonal rest, but for pond professionals, it is when ideas flourish, connections deepen and the groundwork is laid for the year ahead.

This issue captures that spirit. From Eric Twigg's transformation of a simple aquaponics setup into a thriving year-round retreat (p. 8) to Andrew Lohman's smart strategies for keeping koi and goldfish healthy indoors through winter (p. 16), our pages are full of practical insights you can put to work right away. Yvo de Wal takes us deep into the artistry of Japan's koi breeders (p. 21), while April Dugan shares timeless design principles for building resonant waterfalls that connect beauty with nature's rhythm (p. 32).

We also shine a light on seasonal strategies. Sean Bell challenges us to think differently about pond maintenance, embracing evolving filtration systems and hands-on training (p. 41). Andy Pollock offers planting tips that leverage fall's cooler weather for a spectacular spring reveal (p. 46). In Ana Arntson's recap of the PPA Summer Retreat (p. 52), you will feel the power of community — a reminder that collaboration fuels both personal and industry wide growth. Claude Memoli takes us beyond the pond with a story about how a single pigeon sparked a passion that took flight, showing how unexpected moments can lead to fresh inspiration (p. 26).

Finally, Frank Congilose delivers actionable advice for thriving in today's service economy, where success depends as much on people as it does on products (p. 56).

Fall is a reminder that change is constant — and in our industry, that change is what keeps us inspired. It is a time to prepare, learn, plant and connect so that when spring returns, we are ready with fresh ideas and renewed energy.

It is also the perfect moment to celebrate the artistry that defines our craft. That is why I invite you to enter the 2025 Water Artisans of the Year contest. Whether you are a seasoned veteran or just getting started, this is your chance to be recognized, inspire others and connect with the industry on a bigger stage. Winners will be featured in POND Trade Magazine and remembered for their creativity, skill and passion. We cannot wait to see what you have created.

Here's to a season of growth, connection and inspiration.

Until the next splash,
Lauren Nolan
Publisher, POND Trade Magazine







The Evolution of the Pondhouse...

by Eric Twigg,
Midwest Aquatics and Landscaping

Thirteen years ago, I started what I thought was a simple aquaponics project. I had no idea it would grow into something so much bigger—a passion, a sanctuary and, eventually, a full-fledged business. The pond that started it all has gone through three major transformations. Here's the story of how a body of water meant to grow lettuce ended up transforming my life.

The Original Build – Spring 2013

The first pond was never meant to be more than a reservoir to supply nutrients to our aquaponics systems in two adjacent greenhouses. Initially, functionality was the focus and aesthetics were secondary.

When it came time to choose fish for the pond, we chose carp instead of tilapia, after research showed they were excellent nutrient producers for our bell siphon-based grow beds. For about a year, the pond served it's role well.

Summer 2013 – Falling in Love With the Pond

By that summer, our koi were thriving—and noticeably so. While people were quick to let me know the pond wasn't exactly "easy on the eyes," I didn't disagree. At that stage, the pond and fish were simply a cog in the machine. The produce was the real product.

But something unexpected happened: our family started spending more and more time by the pond. Evening koi feedings turned into casual







(Top) Former pond from 2024 prior to re-design. - (Center) Family enjoying the new pond on a summer day. - (Bottom) It's feeding time for the koi in their new pond.

hangouts with a drink in hand. The pond, messy as it was, began to charm us.

We began to make small changes such as planting around the edges, removing old car batteries (yes, really), and lining the perimeter with rock. That summer, our koi grew a lot, and it suddenly hit us: if we lost these fish, it would be both emotionally devastating and logistically disastrous. They were now the heart of our system.

We looked into insuring them. Unfortunately, because koi aren't a "crop" fish like tilapia, we couldn't get coverage. We weren't raising them for food; we were relying on them as heavy bio-producers. Since insurance wasn't an option, we chose the next best thing: protection through infrastructure.

Fall 2014 – Building the Greenhouse

In October 2014, we began constructing a greenhouse over the pond to shield the fish—especially from harsh winter conditions. By late November, the structure was partially up. The ends were left open, and we secured plastic sheeting over them to enclose the space. The entrance was through a small corner opening that resembled a makeshift "hobbit hole."

Even though the greenhouse was only 40 feet long, just enough to cover the pond with no room to spare, we found ourselves going in there often. As winter settled in, it felt surreal to be inside this warm, protected bubble. It became more than shelter—it became an experience.

Spring and Summer 2015 – The Pondhouse Is Born

By spring, we realized just how much our family and friends enjoyed the space. It no longer felt like a utility, it felt like a retreat. Around this time, our focus shifted away from aquaponics and toward developing what we started calling "The Pondhouse."

We couldn't expand the structure's width, but we could extend its length. So we added another 22 feet. That summer, we poured a patio in the back and built a floating wooden deck complete with a roof, TV and mini-fridge. It became our go-to hangout spot. We watched movies, hosted gatherings and made memories.

My dad had an idea: "Let's add a dock." So we did. And suddenly, everything felt complete.

Fall 2015 – Finishing the Structure

We learned a lot from our first winter. Draped plastic ends acted like giant parachutes in the wind—not ideal. Now, with the greenhouse fully extended and the layout locked in, we took the time to frame in the ends properly and install real doors.



New wetlands area and waterfall.

Almost exactly a year after starting construction, the Pondhouse had evolved from an experiment into a fully enclosed, four-season structure. It felt like a hidden oasis—and it finally had a name.

2015–2024 – From





From excavation to finishing touches — this step-by-step series captures the new pond build, dug 10 feet deeper, lined, rebuilt with a new grid system, and fitted with upgraded bottom returns for optimal water flow.

Backyard Project to Business

From 2015 onward, we enjoyed the Pondhouse to the absolute max. It became more than a passion project; it sparked an entire business. That little aquaponics setup eventually led to a full-service pond store and construction company.

Now, 13 years after starting that first system and 10 years into operating the business, the original Pondhouse—my first full pond build—was beginning to show its age. It had held up remarkably well, but it was time to address wear and tear and bring the space up to the standards I always envisioned.

The Rebuild – 2021 to 2024

The decision to rebuild came after a series of weather events:

2021: A derecho swept through, causing minor damage to the greenhouse.

2022: A massive hailstorm shredded the plastic panels, requiring full replacement.

Winter 2022: Another derecho blew in the south wall by 2–3 feet, bending the frame and several perlins.

With structural issues mounting—and the pond developing leaks and liner strain—it was time to fully rebuild. When we first built the wall, we concreted each post into the ground. Rebuilding required those posts to come completely out. With the wall gone, I had the rare opportunity to bring in heavy equipment.





New wall frame and poly.

If we were going to fix it, we were going to do it right.

What Changed

Depth: The original pond was only 3.5 feet deep with a 4-foot center. The new pond is a full 10 feet deep, allowing for safe diving and play.

Rebuildable Wall: I designed the new wall to be modular, with posts set on individual concrete pads. If a storm ever damages it again—or if I want to make major changes—I can rebuild it section by section.

Trench Removal: A 42-foot trench (2 feet wide by 4 feet deep) once connected the pond to another greenhouse. It was collapsing and stretching the liner, so we removed it entirely.

Filtration: We kept the undergravel grid, bead filter and UV, but upgraded the bog to a wetlands system and added an ozone generator.

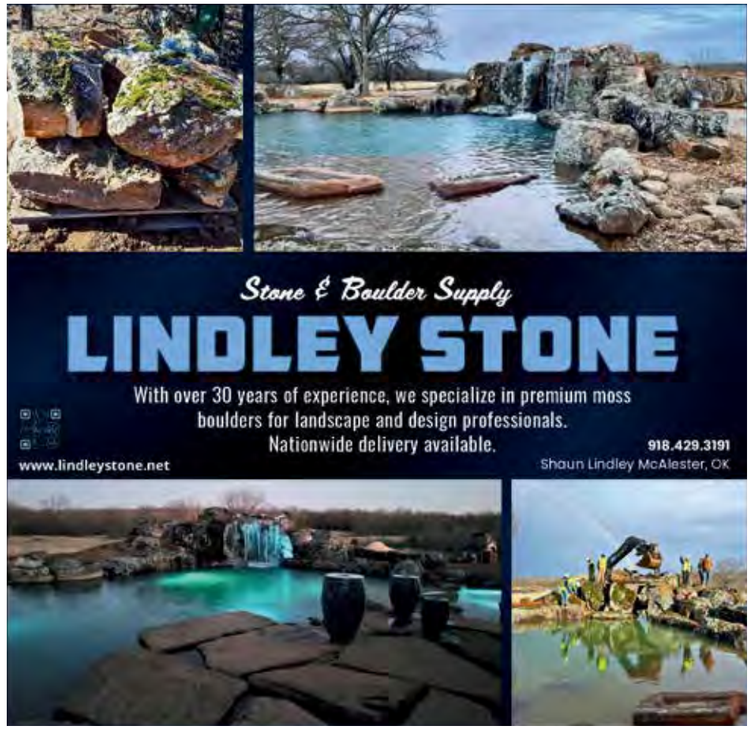
Purpose: While it's still a pond—not a recreational "swimming pond"—we do swim in it often. The new depth and filtration make that easier and more enjoyable.

The Build Process

Although our target timeline was to build from August to October, actual completion expanded into February—just in time for the fish (barely!)

Space was tight compared to the original build. We moved the koi to a temporary 5,000-gallon tank with full filtration. Excavation required me to operate the mini-excavator from inside the hole, working backward. The pond ended up slightly wider but the same footprint—just much deeper.

We dug an extra 4–5 feet in one corner for a sump pit to manage groundwater. The liner was a 50-by-68-foot monster. I called in a small army of friends just to stretch it into place.





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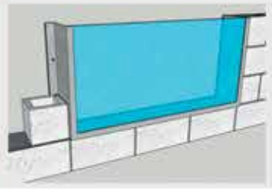


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We rented a 50-foot Lull lift for coping stone placement. After that, we installed the undergravel grid and five bottom returns connected to the ozone system.

For the new wall, we used concrete pads instead of embedding posts. This allows individual replacements, making it easier to manage future wood rot or storm damage. Good thing we did—another summer storm ripped off all the plastic sheeting and hit both walls hard. The north wall will need rebuilding, but the new modular design makes the repairs much simpler.

The New Wetlands and Filtration System

Originally intended as a low-profile setup, we raised the wetlands slightly to add another layer of sound and visual interest to the waterfall. Measuring about 12 by 20 feet, it's built with eco blocks and a 4-inch backwash valve for easy maintenance. It's fed by a 5HP PerformancePro pump drawing from the undergravel grid.

Filtration Components:

- Undergravel grid
- Wetlands
- Skimmer
- Bead filter
- 400W Aqua Ultraviolet Viper UV
- 476W Desert Eagle ozone generator

Pumps:

- One 1HP Wlim pump (skimmer)
- One 5HP PerformancePro (grid)

We don't use chemicals or conventional treatments. Instead, the ozone system plays a crucial role in maintaining clarity and water quality. Regular backwashes and beneficial bacteria additions keep it clean and low maintenance. Weekly tasks include skimmer basket cleaning, bead filter flushing and removing string algae from the wetlands.

Conclusion

It's hard to imagine a day without this pond. It's been instrumental in my growth—not just as a person, but as a pond builder. I used to think the original build was bulletproof. But here I am, already thinking ahead to what the next decade could bring.

Next on the list? Expanding the greenhouse. We've spent countless days—and just as many peaceful evenings—watching our kids swim and enjoy the space. It's truly become our family's retreat. While it shines in summer, it's those warm, humid moments in the dead of winter that make it magical.

This isn't just a pond. It's our escape, our reset button and our refuge from the cold.





About the Author



Eric Twigg has been building, servicing and maintaining ponds full-time for 10+ years. Building ponds was a passion discovered on accident, but he has now built them all over the country and doesn't plan on stopping.



Creative Indoor Setups for Wintering Koi and Goldfish

by Andrew Lohman,
Mt. Parnell Fisheries

Your favorite pond shop is closing down its fish systems for the season, and they're running fantastic end-of-season sales on koi and goldfish you'd love to bring home. It's late in the year, though, and adding them into your pond doesn't feel quite right. Still, they'd make great additions come spring. Rather than walking out empty-handed, consider these ideas for enjoying those beautiful bargain fish indoors this winter and giving them a strong start when pond season returns.

Bringing Fish Indoors for Winter

Some pond owners bring all their fish inside during the winter to protect them from predators and harsh weather—and continue to enjoy their brilliant colors during an otherwise dull time of year. Depending on your pond size and budget, you might already be doing this. If so, that's awesome. Hopefully this article offers a few new ideas or considerations. But if you've assumed keeping fish indoors was impossible on a small scale, I'm here to tell you it's not. You've got options.

Finding the Right Spot

The best indoor location will depend on what you have access to. At a minimum, you'll need electricity, above-freezing temperatures, and access to water for performing water changes. Common wintering areas include heated garages, basements or enclosed porches.

Keep in mind: the warmer the water, the faster your fish will grow—and the more frequently you'll need to manage waste through water changes. No matter your setup, overwintering indoors also offers a great opportunity to quarantine and observe new fish before introducing them to your pond. You'll have time to treat for any health issues and bond with them in a whole new way.



Two Rubbermaid stock tanks inside a garage filled with koi.

Indoor Housing Options

Most of these setups range between 100 and 700 gallons of water. Your system size will help determine the number and size of fish you can safely house. All of them require some form of mechanical and biological filtration, which could mean repurposing an old pond filter or purchasing a new one specific to your system's needs.

Cycling your indoor tank before introducing fish is crucial. One simple way is to squeeze a sponge filter from an established tank into your new system to seed beneficial bacteria. You'll also want a dechlorinator to remove chlorine and chloramine during water changes, and a water testing kit or strips to monitor ammonia, nitrite and nitrate levels.









(Top): An example of an IBC tank for koi, though netting would be required. (Botttom): When keeping koi indoors it is important to remember they jump, and jump a lot. The placement of a net will keep all your prized jewels contained until you can release them outdoors in spring time.

Ammonia and nitrite can be deadly, while nitrates above 80 to 100 ppm may not kill koi or goldfish, but should prompt a water change.

Option 1: The Most Cost-Effective – IBC Totes

Intermediate Bulk Containers (IBCs) are one of the cheapest and easiest solutions. These food-grade plastic containers typically hold 275 gallons and can often be found used online through platforms like Craigslist or Facebook Marketplace. A new one will cost more but still beats many alternatives.

When buying used, confirm it was previously used for food-grade storage, and clean it thoroughly. Leave part of the top frame intact for rigidity and to help redirect jumping fish back into the tank. The built-in bottom drain is another major perk, simplifying water changes. A net is optional but recommended.

Option 2: The Largest Size – Stock Tanks

Plastic stock tanks range from 150 to 750 gallons and offer more surface area than IBC totes, giving your fish room to swim horizontally. Their low-profile, wide shape makes them well suited for indoor pond features. Koi, however, are known jumpers—especially in areas with high water movement—so a net or cover is a must.

Most are black, which can impact how fish colors appear depending on lighting. If you're going for aesthetics, these can be dressed up with potted plants to give the illusion of an outdoor pond indoors. Avoid galvanized metal stock tanks, which may leach harmful zinc into the water.

Option 3: The Most Expensive – Glass Aquariums

Aquariums offer the best viewing experience, especially from the side. But they're also the most expensive and most fragile of the options. A new 240-gallon tank can run upwards of $3,000, while a food-grade IBC tote or 300-gallon stock tank could cost as little as $150 to $275.

Aquariums also come with risks: seams can leak, and glass is vulnerable to breakage—especially in garages or busy indoor spaces. While they look beautiful, glass tanks wouldn't be my first choice unless you already have one available. That said, they are perfect for hobbyists wanting to enjoy their fish from every angle.

How Many Fish Can I Keep?

You may have noticed I've intentionally avoided giving specific recommendations on how many fish to keep, or what size filter you need. That's because every system is different. Your fish load depends on your water volume, temperature, filtration capacity and how often you can perform water changes.

Generally speaking, colder systems (around 40–50°F) can support more fish, since they eat less, produce less waste and require less oxygen. Warmer systems (around 70°F) require more filtration and oversight.

As a general starting point, a 4–6 inch fish can be comfortably housed in about 30–40 gallons of water. Experienced aquarists may safely keep more, but remember—more fish means more maintenance. I've seen 5,000 juvenile koi (3–4 inches) successfully overwintered in a 400-gallon tank, but that was with a highly specialized setup. That's a discussion for another time.



These Sanke brood koi from Mt. Parnell Fisheries were overwintered in our recirculating system and will head to ponds in spring after being selected as potential brood.

A Few Off-the-Wall Ideas

There are other creative indoor housing options, too. Used fiberglass tanks are durable and often spacious, though expensive when purchased new. Another quirky option is a swimming pool—if you can convince your significant other! Some manufacturers even offer small pools specifically designed for fish, complete with clear front panels for top-down and side viewing. Whatever route you choose, the key is creating a safe, stable and comfortable environment where your fish can thrive until they return to their outdoor home in the spring.

About the Author



Andrew Lohman is a biologist at Mt. Parnell Fisheries Co. in Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, where he manages recirculating systems, spawns koi and goldfish, and assists with nationwide fish shipping. A lifelong fishkeeper, Andrew got his start helping his father with home aquariums. He holds a Bachelor's in Biology from Hillsdale College and a Master's in Aquaculture from Kentucky State University. He documents his aquarium setups on YouTube and is planning a family pond build in the near future.

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CRAFTING LIVING *Jewels*

The Art of Koi Breeding in Japan

by Yvo de Wal,
The Koi Partner

Every spring in the mountains of Niigata, Japan, a quiet but extraordinary ritual begins. In the shadow of snow-capped peaks, amidst neatly arranged rice paddies and cedar forests, generations of koi breeders rise before dawn. Their lives revolve around one singular pursuit: crafting the perfect koi.

As The Koi Partner, I've had the rare privilege of not just observing, but participating in this sacred process. Over the past few years, I've visited and filmed koi breeding at some of Japan's most revered farms, including Shintaro Koi Farm and Isa Koi Farm. These experiences have profoundly changed how I understand koi—not merely as pets or fish, but as living, breathing art pieces born from decades of discipline and devotion.

In this article, I'll take you behind the scenes of this incredible process, offering a close-up look at the labor, precision, heartbreak and triumph involved in creating a champion koi.

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Tradition Rooted in the Mountains

The Niigata region—and more precisely, the city of Ojiya—is the birthplace of Nishikigoi, what the world now simply calls "koi." The word Nishikigoi literally means "swimming jewels," a fitting name for creatures that shimmer like art in the water.

This part of Japan is not only blessed with clean mountain spring water, but also with centuries of koi-breeding knowledge passed down through generations. Breeding koi here isn't just a business—it's a lifestyle, a philosophy and a craft on par with ceramics, sword-making or calligraphy.

Shintaro and Isa Koi Farms are two prime examples of this heritage. Both farms have decades of experience and an unwavering commitment to quality over quantity. The breeders don't chase trends, rather they aim to produce koi that will still be admired a decade from now.



Mud ponds in the Yamakoshi Mountains - Niigata Prefecture.

The Breeding Season Begins

Koi breeding typically begins in late April or early May, depending on weather conditions. By this time, the breeders have already selected their parent koi, known as oyagoi. These aren't just any mature koi—each oyagoi represents the best bloodlines, body shape, skin quality and color development the breeder has cultivated over many years.

Watching the breeding process at Isa Koi Farm was both mesmerizing and humbling. I saw master breeder Mitsunori Isa gently lift a massive female Showa, nearly 85 centimeters long, from her holding pond. Every movement was calculated. Despite her size, she was handled with absolute care. Next came the males—slimmer, but full of energy. They were introduced into the spawning process in the evening, and by early morning, the magic had begun.

What looks serene on the surface is anything but. Spawning is an explosive, chaotic event. The water churns as the males chase the female, nudging her to release eggs—hundreds of thousands of them—which they then try to fertilize. Breeders must monitor the process constantly to ensure the koi don't injure themselves.

Timing is critical. To protect the koi, breeders often manually remove the eggs and sperm to fertilize them in a separate pond. This method ensures the safest outcome and minimizes stress for the fish.

The First Culling: Where Dreams Are Cut Short

About three days after spawning, the fertilized eggs hatch into fry. They are just a few millimeters long—almost translucent and far from the colorful koi we recognize.

Roughly two weeks later, the first culling begins.

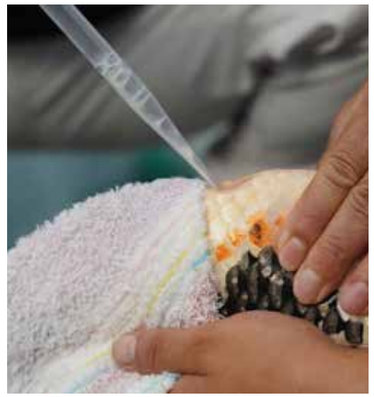
This is the part most outsiders can't fully grasp. Out of the hundreds of thousands of fry, fewer than 0.5% to 1% will be kept. The rest are removed based on deformities, poor coloration or other undesirable traits. It's a harsh process, but a necessary one—just as in nature, where only the strongest carp survive. You can't produce world-class koi without making tough choices, and that's why breeders try to sell most of their unselected fish domestically or to dealers worldwide.

At Isa Koi Farm, I watched Mr. Isa and his team cull fry using nothing more than blue bowls and handheld nets. They moved with incredible speed, yet each decision was rooted in years of experience. A tiny pattern or the hint of future color development could mean the difference between a fish being kept or culled.

I asked Mr. Isa how he makes these decisions. He simply said, "You have to see the koi not for what it is, but for what it could be."

That's the heart of koi breeding—vision. Breeders don't just see today's fish—they see what that fish might look like five years down the road, and whether it has the potential to become a champion.









(Right) Isa spreading the eggs mixed with the male sperm. - (Center Top) Sterile water for receiving the eggs. - (Center Bottom) Female exit where the eggs came from, female koi is ready to spawn her eggs. (Left) Collecting sperm from male koi.

Seasons of Growth and Challenge

After culling, the selected fry are moved into carefully managed mud ponds—shallow, earthen pools rich in minerals and natural food sources. This is where the koi begin their first true stage of growth.

From May to October, breeders work almost nonstop. They monitor the mud ponds daily, checking water quality, adjusting feeding schedules and observing the development of their young koi. Any change in temperature, water pH or oxygen level can hinder growth or ruin skin quality.

Shintaro's mud ponds are legendary for the skin luster they help produce. The minerals in the soil contribute to a deep, rich beni (red pigment) and bright, snow-white shiroji. But this comes at a cost—harvesting koi from these ponds in autumn is a monumental task.

I filmed the ikeage (harvest) at Shintaro last October. It began at sunrise, with a team of workers in waders slowly herding the koi to one





end of the pond with nets. Together with my U.S. partner, Fitz's Fish Ponds, we helped the breeder during this process. The breeders watched with bated breath as the koi were lifted out, one by one, revealing how each fish had developed over the summer.

Some had grown dramatically. Others had deepened in color. A few developed perfect patterns. This is when breeders face a hard truth: even with the best bloodlines and ideal conditions, koi breeding is still a gamble.


Koi chasing the female for mating.

Breeding Koi is an Art and a Gamble

If you think about it, breeding koi is unlike any other livestock or pet operation in the world. Imagine a painter beginning a masterpiece by splattering a thousand tiny drops of paint onto a canvas—and only keeping the two that landed just right. That's koi breeding.

Each generation of koi is a high-stakes art project. Breeders often invest 10 to 15 years into developing a single bloodline. They experiment with pairings, tweak growing conditions and make difficult, future-altering decisions at every stage. The odds of producing a koi that wins at Japan's prestigious All Japan Koi Show? Maybe 1 in a million.

And yet, they keep going.

Why? Because for Japanese breeders, it's not about money or recognition. It's about perfection. It's about continuing a tradition that stretches back centuries. It's about the dream of producing a living jewel—something that carries the soul of its maker and stirs the heart of everyone who sees it.

What I've Learned in 10 Years

Being The Koi Partner has given me rare access to this secretive world. I've captured hours of footage, documented stunning koi transformations and witnessed both joy and heartbreak behind the scenes. But more than anything, I've come away with a deep respect for the breeders.



ISA Koi breeding ponds.

They are not just farmers. They are artists. Scientists. Philosophers. And above all, craftsmen.

There is a quiet dignity in how they work. You won't find flashy websites or big marketing campaigns. Most breeders prefer to let their koi speak for themselves. And when you see a truly great koi—a Kohaku with perfect symmetry, or a Showa with jet-black sumi balanced by fiery beni—you understand why.

That fish is not an accident. It's the result of thousands of decisions, hundreds of early mornings and countless moments of doubt.

As koi enthusiasts, hobbyists or dealers, it's easy to admire the beauty of a finished koi. But understanding where that koi came from—and what it took to breed, raise and refine it—adds a whole new level of appreciation.

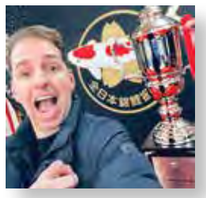
So, the next time you see a koi swimming gracefully in a dealer's tank or at a koi show, take a moment to think about its journey. Think about the mud pond in Niigata it came from. Think about the breeder who culled thousands just to keep that one. Think about the craftsmanship behind every scale, every curve, every pattern.

Koi may be fish. But in the hands of Japanese breeders, they become something much more.

They become living works of art.


ISA Main Champion Pond Harvest 2024.

About the Author



Yvo de Wal is known as "The Koi Partner," a koi enthusiast and documentarian who travels Japan filming the hidden world of koi breeding. Follow his journey on YouTube and Instagram (@thekoipartner) to experience the beauty and craft of koi like never before.



A New Passion *Takes Flight*

How One Pigeon Changed Everything

by Claude Memoli,
Uni-Scape

One quiet morning on my way to work, I noticed what looked like a beautiful white dove near my shop. As I got closer, I realized it wasn't just any bird — it had a small band around its leg. That's when it hit me: this was a racing pigeon.

What struck me most was how calm and friendly the bird was. It didn't fly off or panic. It let me approach — almost as if it was waiting for me. There was something intentional in the way it carried itself, a sense of purpose. That simple, unexpected encounter sparked a curiosity I couldn't ignore.

That evening, I went home and started researching the world of pigeons. What I found surprised me. Not only were there racing pigeons — like the famous Janssen line, known for flying more than 500 miles and still finding their way home with pinpoint accuracy — but there were also breeds like the Birmingham Roller, a performer in the sky, flipping and spinning in aerial acrobatics that looked choreographed and mesmerizing.

Beyond the Pond











Learning to Train a Team of the Sky

The deeper I went, the more fascinated I became. These birds weren't just smart — they were athletes. Their instincts, intelligence and sheer determination were unlike anything I had ever seen. And just like with any athlete, training is everything.

I started learning about training schedules for racing pigeons — how fliers begin with short tosses, just a mile or two from home, gradually increasing in distance as the birds build confidence and orientation skills. Young pigeons are taught to trap into their lofts on command, often using a whistle, bell or shaker cup filled with feed. They associate the sound with food, and over time, they respond almost instantly.

To prevent overexertion and stress, most flyers train their birds once per day, usually in the early morning when the air is calm and the risk from predators is lower. A typical session starts with "loft flying," where the birds exercise freely around home for 30 to 60 minutes. After that, road training begins. This includes carefully planned tosses from increasing distances to help pigeons hone their homing ability. Some racers even use GPS bands to track flight paths and spot potential performance issues.

Feeding, Conditioning, and Building Trust

What amazed me even more was the level of care and strategy that goes into conditioning. The birds follow tailored feeding routines: lighter mixes during the buildup phase to encourage flight and burn energy, and heavier grains like corn and peas as race day nears to load their muscles with energy.

Hand-feeding can also be used as a bonding tool — teaching birds to associate you with food and safety. It's amazing how quickly they begin to trust you. Before long, they're perching on your arm or roof, watching your every move, waiting for their signal.

Rollers are a different story. While racing pigeons are trained for endurance and orientation, Birmingham Rollers are trained to perform aerial acrobatics in synchronized teams called "kits." A good kit consists of 15 to 20 birds that fly together tightly, climbing into the air before beginning their signature rolls, flipping backward mid-air in rapid bursts, then regrouping in formation.

To train them, you start young. You must fly them frequently, encouraging shorter sessions so they don't exhaust themselves. You must pay close attention to wind, temperature and feeding times. A hungry bird tends to stay closer to home, while a bird fed too soon may not perform. Selective breeding is also essential, pairing only birds with strong performance genetics and consistent form.

Watching a team of rollers hit a perfect



A PUMP THAT PUTS YOUR POND AT A HIGHER LEVEL



While there are multiple elements that make up a pond, one of the most foundational is the pump. After all, it's essential for the health of your fish and overall pond performance. Medo LA Series blowers provide unparalleled performance for koi pond and water garden applications. This is why they're the professional choice:

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The Pigeon Poop Game-Changer

If you've ever owned pigeons, you know the routine: beautiful birds, peaceful coos and a never-ending supply of droppings.

Cleaning used to be the least glamorous part of my day — scraping, scooping and doing my best to keep the loft clean and fresh for the flock. Then I installed a conveyor belt cleaning system, and it changed everything.

Now, instead of spending an hour hunched over trays, I simply turn a handle or flip a switch. The conveyor quietly does its job. It carries away the mess, keeping the loft sanitary and giving me back time to focus on what really matters: training, feeding and enjoying my birds.

It's like going from a broomstick to a leaf blower. From the dark ages to pigeon paradise. From daily dread to daily ease.

If you're thinking about upgrading your loft, do it. Your back will thank you. Your birds will thank you. And your mornings will be just a little more peaceful.

To see the system I built, scan this code to check out my video on YouTube.



Want to take flight yourself? Check out the American Racing Pigeon Union or the National Birmingham Roller Club to learn more about this incredible world.

"break" — five or more birds spinning in unison — is like witnessing a flock of dancers performing an aerial ballet.

Discovering Community, Craft, and Connection

The relationship these birds form with their handlers reminded me of the satisfaction I feel when designing a perfect landscape or sculpting a natural waterfall. Both require patience, precision and a deep connection to nature.

But what truly drew me in was the concept of the team.

Pigeons train together.

Pigeons fly together.

Pigeons perform together.

They support one another in the air.

Most people dream of coaching a sports team — football, baseball, something grand. But not everyone has that chance. A team of pigeons? That was something within reach.

From the moment they hatch to their first flight, I'm there feeding, observing, nurturing — watching them grow into athletes of the sky. I even began keeping training logs to track their weight, molting cycles and flight behavior. What started as a casual interest soon became a full-blown passion.

I began studying bloodlines and genetics, learning about nutrition, conditioning, and training. I discovered communities of pigeon enthusiasts, from backyard breeders to international competitors, all connected by this timeless pursuit.

Now, raising and training both racing pigeons and rollers has become a peaceful and deeply rewarding part of my daily life. There's something magical about watching a group of rollers spin high above, or seeing a lone racer return from hundreds of miles away — wings steady, heart full.

A New Outlook on Life, One Bird at a Time

It's not just a hobby. It's a journey. A blend of art and instinct. Discipline and beauty. Motion and mindfulness.

What began as a routine commute turned into a life-changing passion, one that's shown me the wonders of the sky, the quiet strength of teamwork, and the joy that can come from simply stopping to notice a bird.

About the Author



Claude Memoli opened Uni-Scape Landscape and Design at the young age of 20 after working for his family's landscaping business and subsequently falling in love with it. Now with more than 28 years of experience, he specializes in waterscapes, hardscapes, design, lighting and breeding koi. He is a Certified Aquascape Contractor who is highly decorated for his work in landscape design and koi breeding.

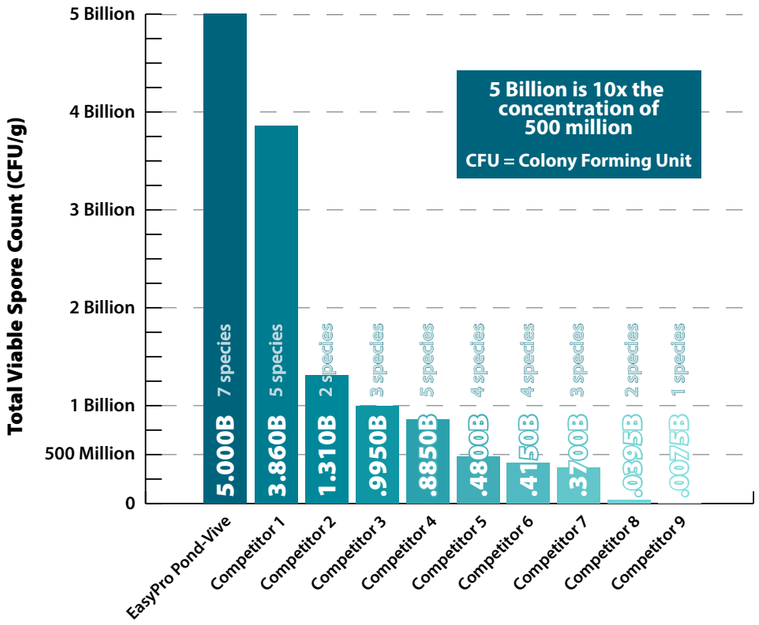
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Beneficial Bacteria Testing

Microbial Analysis



Conclusion

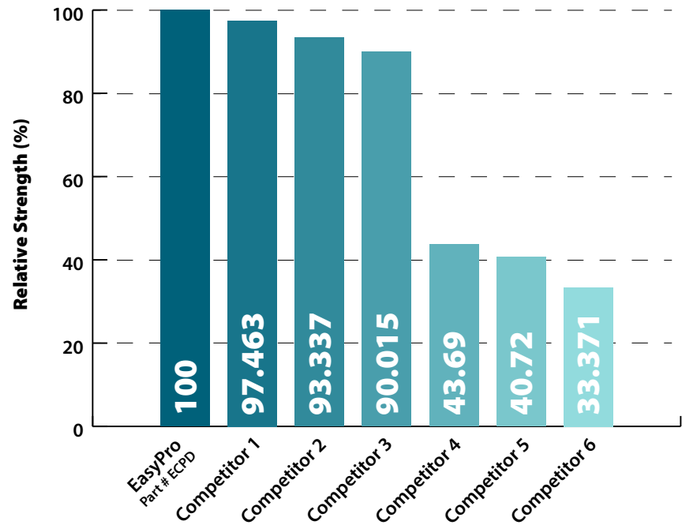
Microbial analysis confirmed EasyPro's Pond-Vive delivers the highest total viable bacterial spore counts with 5-10x more viable spores. Compared to other products, Pond-Vive also provides the greatest diversity in muck eating bacterial species.

While several products tested below 1 billion CFU/mL (with some as low as 7.5 million) EasyPro consistently delivers beneficial bacteria concentrations of 5 billion CFU/mL, supporting faster and more effective organic muck breakdown in ponds and lakes.

To view the full report, including enzymatic analysis, scan the code or go to easypro.com

Blue Dye Comparison

Concentrated Liquid Lake Dye





Conclusion

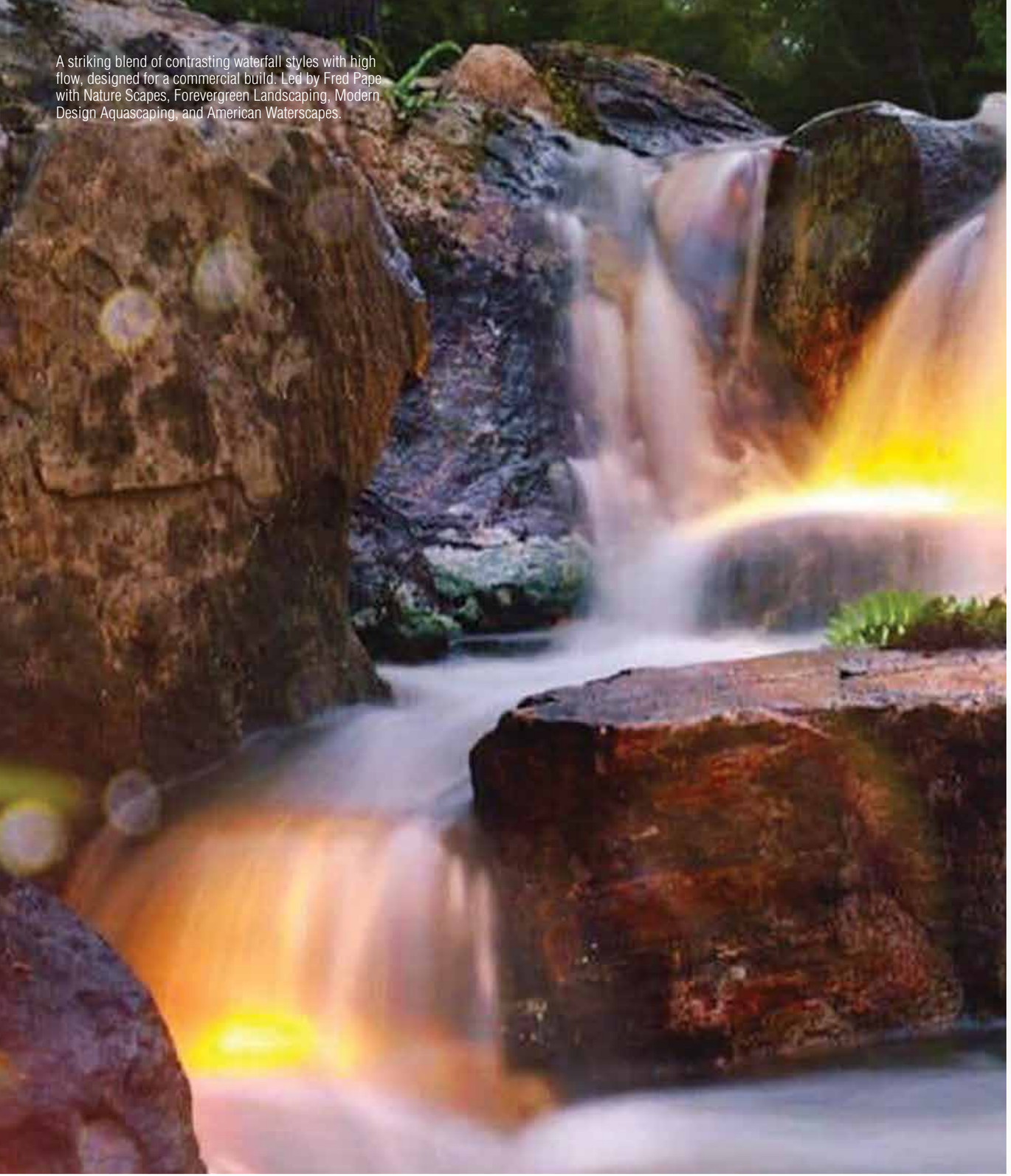
Spectro scan testing demonstrated that EasyPro's Lake Dye delivers the highest color strength, serving as the 100% performance benchmark.

- Competitors 1–3 are up to 10% weaker than EasyPro's Blue Lake Dye.
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A striking blend of contrasting waterfall styles with high flow, designed for a commercial build. Led by Fred Pape with Nature Scapes, Forevergreen Landscaping, Modern Design Aquascaping, and American Waterscapes.

Waterfalls

The Art of Guiding Water

by April Dugan,
American Waterscapes

A single crystalline drop, shimmering in the sun, swells until gravity pulls it to the mossy pool below with a satisfying plunk.

Water runs downhill.

The thrum of a spring stream, flush with rain, moves over rocks, through roots and around boulders as it races along a course set by countless droplets before it.

It takes the path of least resistance.

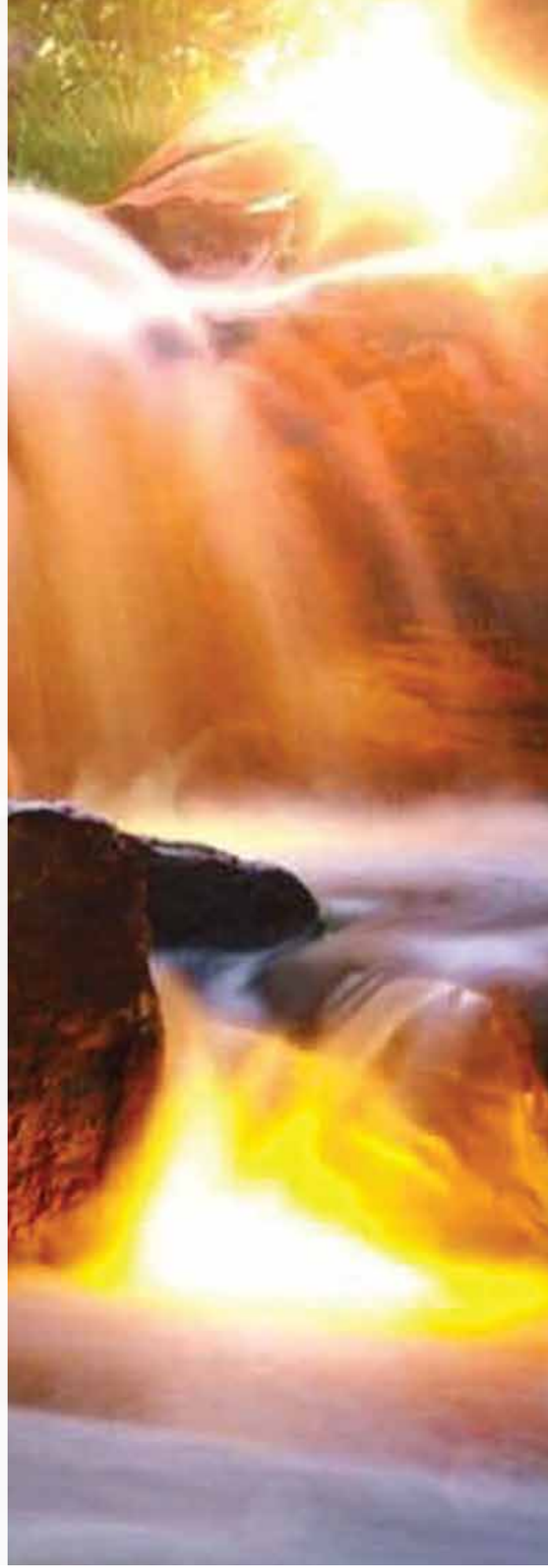
It glides effortlessly into the tranquil waters of a misty mountain lake at sunrise.

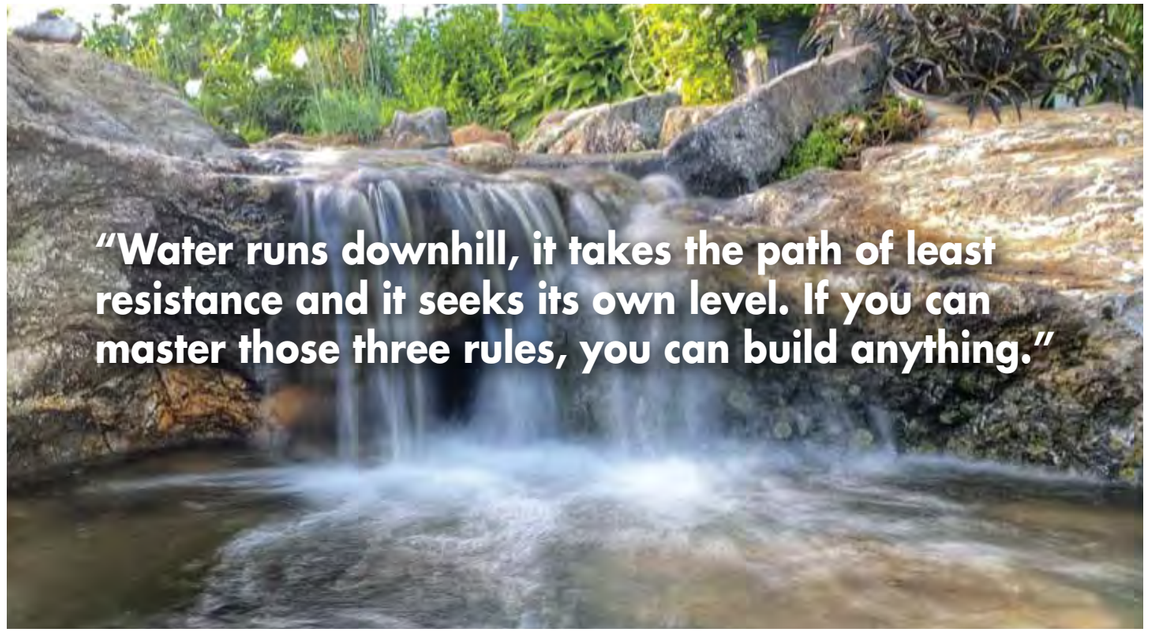
It seeks its own level.

These are the rules of water.

I was just in my 20s when I first heard those rules from a gentleman pond builder named Scotty Hammond.

"Water runs downhill, it takes the path of least resistance, and it seeks its own level. If you can master those three rules, you can build anything," he would say in his Western twang, shaking his head in what seemed like awe every time he said it.





Here are some basic tips and tricks—recipes, you might say—I’ve picked up for building waterfalls. Some are from people wiser than me, and others are from woodland explorations around our blue planet.

Types of Waterfalls

There are essentially two types of waterfalls: **Sheet Falls**, which are created by water shearing off sharp surface and **Boulder Falls**, which are created by water flowing along and around smoother, rounded surfaces.

Objects, artifacts and sculptures can also follow these same principles. For example, water falling off the tailgate of a truck is a sheet fall. Water following the curves of a sculpture resembles a boulder fall.

Basic Construction of Sheet Falls

In order to create Sheet Falls, use a flat rock or object with a sharp edge, set perfectly level from left to right. Tilt the stone slightly (up to 1/4 bubble on a level) from front to back to encourage clean sheeting. You’ll need between 1,000 and 3,000 gallons per hour per foot, depending on viewing distance. Sheet falls create a high-pitched, rain-like sound.

Glass Falls: These are precision sheet falls. The stone or object must be perfectly flat and level to create a “glass-like” window of water. Use 1,000 gallons per hour per foot, however if height increase you will need more to preserve clarity. Glass falls are excellent for showcasing plants or sculptures behind the water curtain.

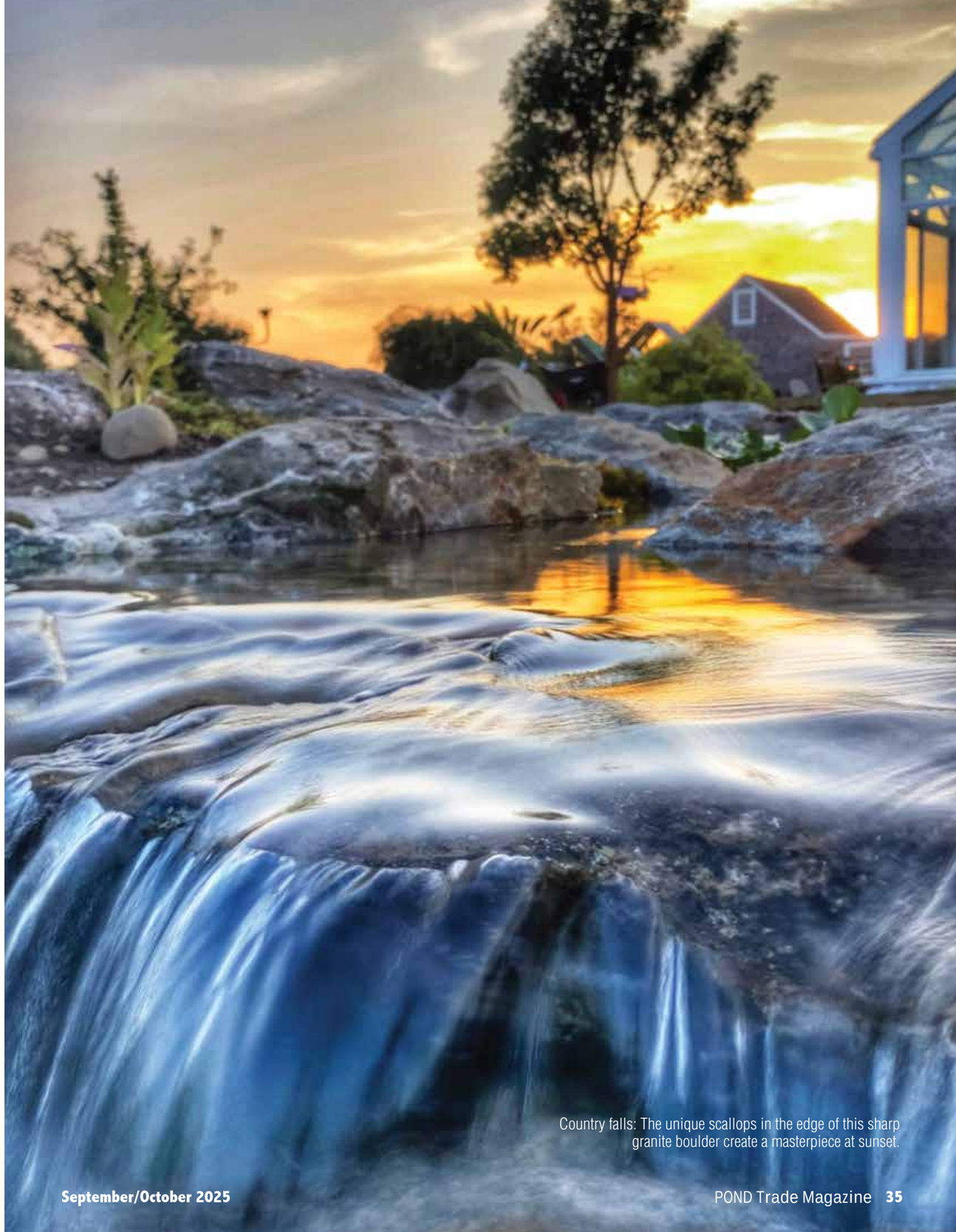
Country Falls: These are a natural variation of the sheet fall. Less perfect stones are used, allowing for more water (3,000+ gallons per hour per foot). The stone should be level left to right and slightly tilted front to back. Sound range varies but generally falls in the mid-to-low pitch, depending on water volume, stone size, and the design of the cave or pooling area below.

Horseshoe Falls: These use a concave shape, either crafted from multiple stones or found naturally. A glassy look can be achieved with less water, while larger volumes allow for powerful Niagara-like effects. Build using either Glass or Country Fall principles, depending on the desired aesthetic.

Dripping Moss Falls: Level a stone and cover its front and sides with moss to create a dripping moss fall. At a gentle flow rate (around 100 gallons per hour per foot), water will bead and drip. Alternatively, create a custom version using drilled pipe with small holes covered in moss and waterfall foam. A ball valve allows you to fine-tune the flow for that perfect mossy effect.

Basic Construction of Boulder Falls

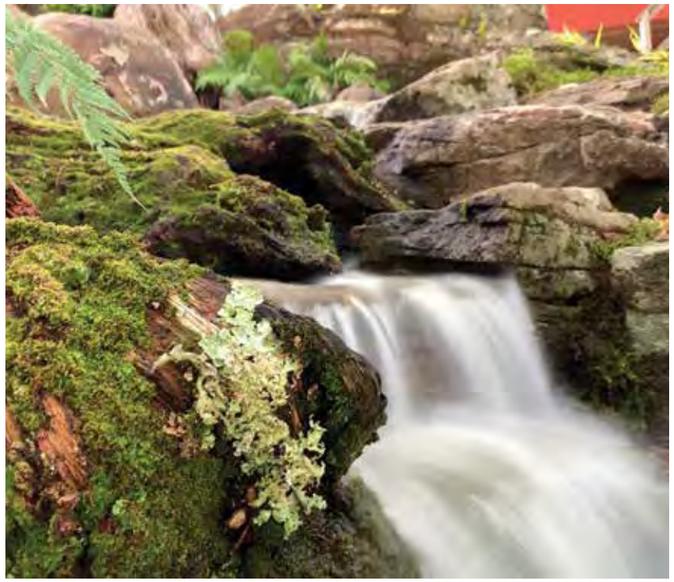
Boulder falls are formed by arranging boulders or objects to shape shoulders and a weir. Water clings to smooth, round surfaces and falls away from sharper edges. These falls tend to have a deeper, bass-heavy sound—like a bass drum compared to a snare. Larger rocks, deep caves, and pooling areas help amplify the sound. Use 2,000 gallons per hour per foot or more.



Country falls: The unique scallops in the edge of this sharp granite boulder create a masterpiece at sunset.











(Top Left) Sheet fall spills into a slide a great combination for extra action in a waterfall. - (Bottom Left) Collaboration: Nature Build Australia and American Waterscapes. - (Top Right) Traditional sheet falls with sharp-level stones for a clean water sheer. Collaboration: Easton Outdoors & American Waterscapes. - (Center Right) Built by Ed Beaulieu. - (Bottom Right) A large boulder completely redirects water via a shoot.

Shoot Falls: Create a channel between two boulders by angling them to create a low point. This forms a focused shoot of water. Finish tightly to avoid losing water between stones. Use cobbles or riprap to style the exit. Should you choose cobbles, you will get a braided look. Choose riprap for a whitewater aesthetic.

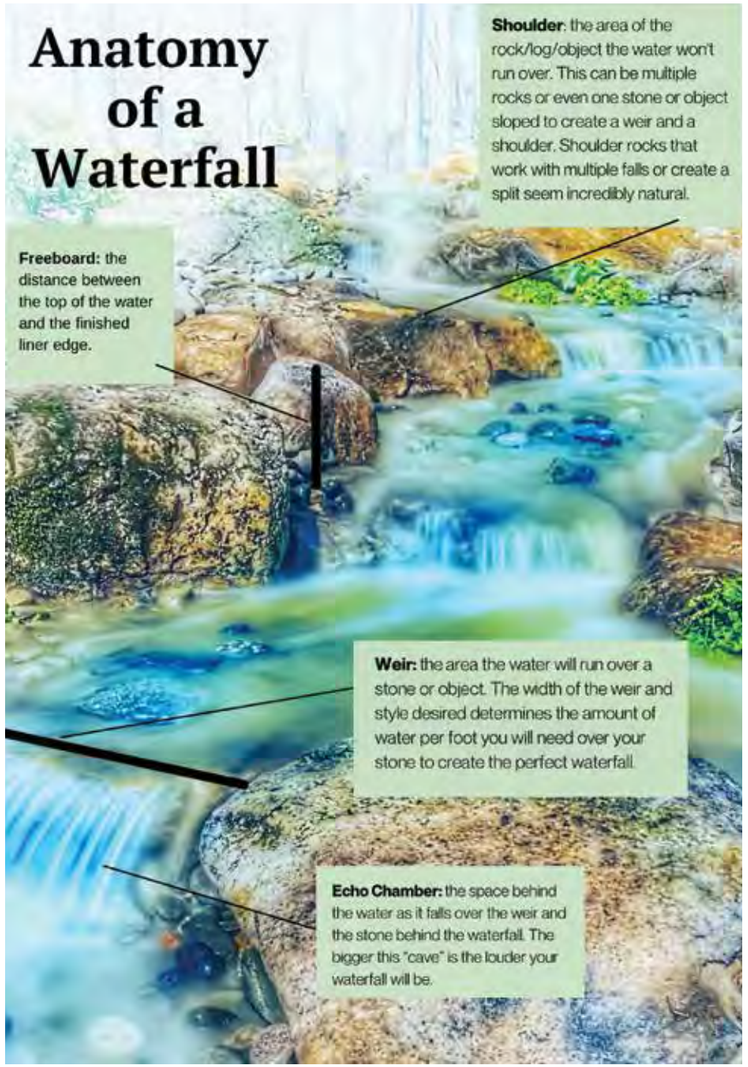
Slide Falls: When it comes to slide falls, the direction of flow is determined by the angle of the rocks, which should be placed slightly off-level toward the desired direction. Slide waterfalls work beautifully in a series or in areas with minimal height variation.

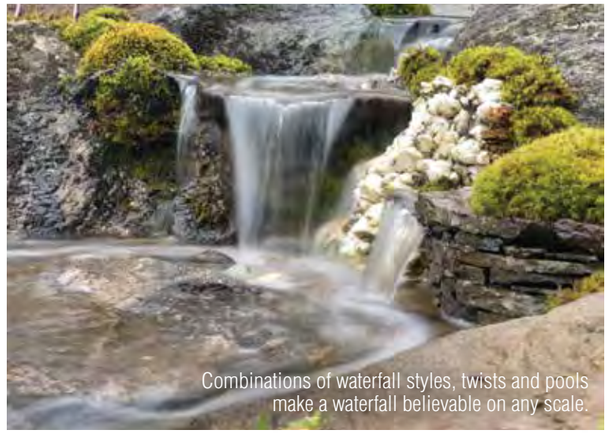
Horsetail Falls: These are inspired by natural falls that are formed from low spaces in cliffs. Mimic this look with two rocks placed close together and a small cobble in between for the water to follow. The narrow, vertical stream contrasts beautifully with wider waterfalls.

Log Falls: Logs or stumps are used as water features. Measure the low point of the log with a level to find your weir. Ensure a minimum 3-inch difference from high to low ends for proper flow and freeboard. Combine with stones for a natural, post-flood look.

Use durable hardwoods like cedar, locust or teak for longevity. The contrast between wood and stone is visually dynamic and naturally compelling.

Craigle Falls: This style mimics rocks tumbled down a slope and lodged between larger boulders at a choke point. Set shoulder rocks securely and seal them well. Place sharp-edged stones vertically to cut and redirect water. Each rock should be sealed at the base before foaming in place. Though time-consuming, this technique results in a waterfall that appears forged by nature.





Combinations of waterfall styles, twists and pools make a waterfall believable on any scale.



A horsetail is a great contrast to sheet type falls.



Sheet fall spills into a slide a great combination for extra action in a waterfall.

Finishing Tips

To finish a waterfall consider the following finishing tips:

• Fill any gaps behind waterfall boulders with gravel, stopping 4 inches below the water surface.

• Compact the gravel carefully. (We use the back of an ax handle to get into tight spots.)

• Insert a drop liner, a small piece of liner used in addition to your main liner, to seal spaces behind waterfall weirs.

• Foam the edges of the drop liner in a 4-inch band on each side. Foam along the rock edge first, then 4 inches into the gravel, then connect those two lines to form a complete seal.

For larger or vertical gaps, roll up scraps of underlayment like cigars, coat them with foam and press between rocks. Once dry, fill any missed gaps, then decorate with stone, moss, wood or plants.

Look to Nature

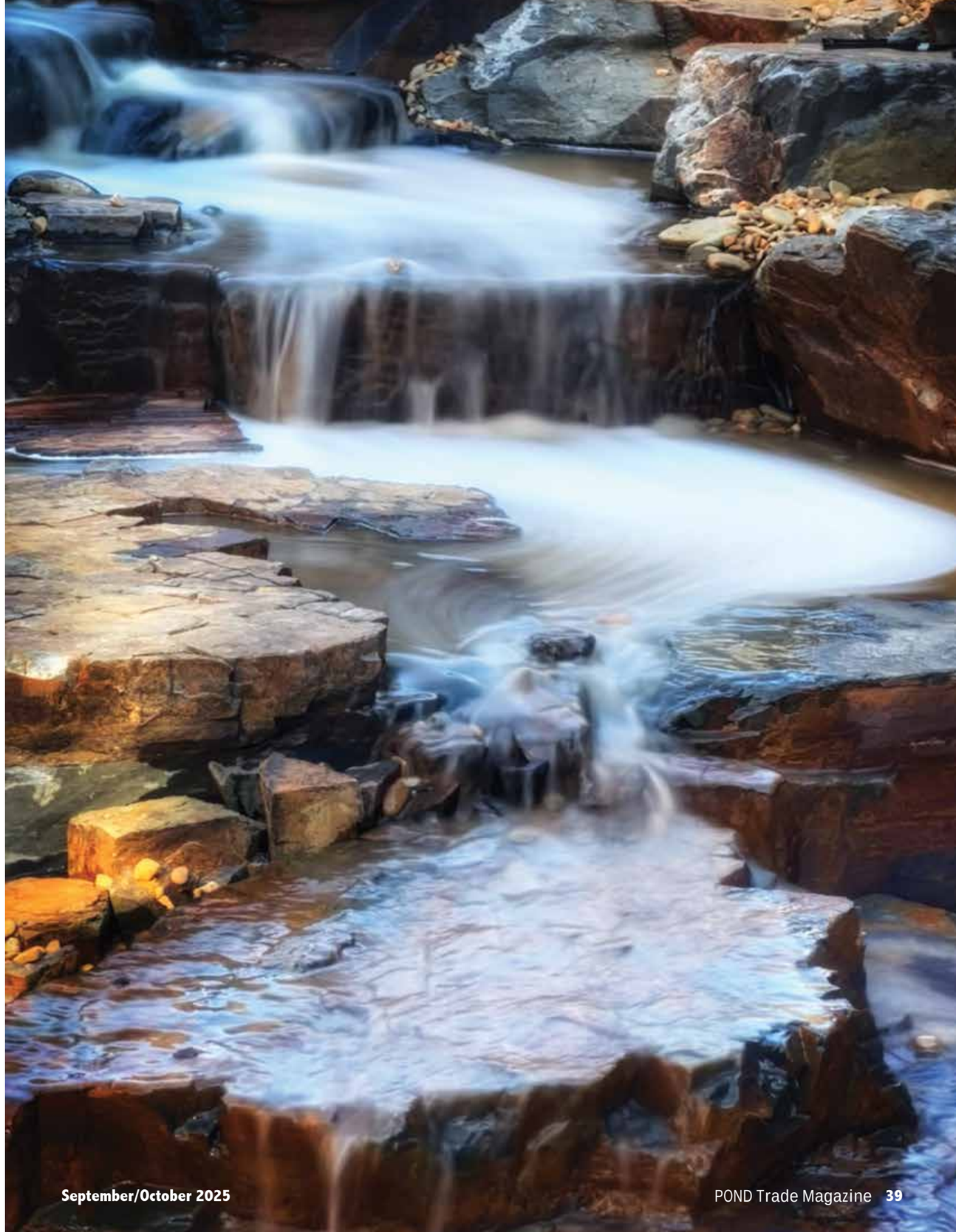
Before building, I try to study natural waterfalls and streams. Observing how water moves in the wild helps me avoid simply replicating another artist's work. Instead, I strive to imitate the true artist—Mother Nature herself.

There are endless possibilities and inspiration waiting in the woods, if we just take time to explore our surroundings.

About the Author



April Dugan has been privileged for the last 20 years to build alongside some of the greatest pond builders of our time. She was the first female finalist in the 2021 Water Artisans of the Year contest. April has worked on four continents and in 18 states building ponds, waterfalls and rainwater-harvesting systems for private residences. The greatest joy of her life was building RainXchange drinking water systems for villages in third world countries with the Aquascape Foundation. To date, the organization has provided drinking water for some 70,000 people.



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Why Hands-On Training Still Matters

by Sean Bell,
Eastern Regional Sales Manager, Atlantic-Oase

For decades, the seasonal cleanout has been viewed as a necessary part of pond ownership. Draining the pond, relocating fish, removing sludge, and rebooting the ecosystem is a common spring ritual. But as more professionals question whether this model truly benefits the pond (or their business) alternatives are beginning to emerge.

Contractors often spend the first part of the season revisiting the same questions: Why is my water green? What's growing on the rocks? Why is my filter overflowing? These recurring conversations eat into valuable time that could be spent designing and building new features. For many in the industry, it raises a larger question: Is there a more efficient, sustainable way to maintain ponds?

Evolving Systems and Smarter Service Models

New approaches to pond design and filtration have opened the door to more balanced ecosystems and more predictable maintenance. One emerging model moves away from the once-a-year overhaul and replaces it with seasonal service visits focused on inspection, calibration and proactive care.







This shift mirrors how other home systems, such as HVAC or pool equipment, are maintained. Rather than waiting for problems, it emphasizes routine performance checks and cleaning, allowing contractors to catch issues early and support water quality year-round.

Technically, these systems often combine mechanical filtration (such as drum filters) with biological bio-reactors, UV sterilizers, and digitally programmable pumps. When installed and serviced correctly, they can drastically reduce the need to drain or disrupt the pond, preserving both water quality and ecosystem stability.

In the Field: The Pond Build Spring Edition

Earlier this year, contractors from across the region gathered in Dyersburg, Tennessee, for The Pond Build Spring Edition—a multi-day, hands-on training focused on installing a complete modern filtration system. Hosted in partnership with a distributor and Atlantic-Oase, the training featured installation of the Clearwater Pond System, a hybrid design that integrates traditional skimmer-and-falls layouts with modular filtration technology.

Participants collaborated on excavation, plumbing, media installation and system testing. From configuring multiple flow paths to setting up automation features, the build emphasized both mechanical know-how and biological understanding.

Importantly, the event allowed contractors to get direct experience working with newer system components—tools and technologies they may not encounter regularly in the field. These included self-cleaning drum filters, oxygenated moving beds and smart pump control systems.

Peer Learning and Professional Growth

One of the most valuable aspects of this kind of hands-on training is the peer-to-peer interaction. In an industry where many work independently, training builds community and offers the chance to trade insights, pricing strategies, installation tips and problem-solving techniques with fellow professionals.

The collaborative environment also sparks innovation. When contractors from different regions, business sizes and backgrounds work side-by-side, they share real experiences—what works, what doesn't, and how to adapt systems to different client needs.



(Top Left) Contractors work together to install equipment and place rocks at the Spring Build. - (Center) Contractors at the Atlantic-Oase trainings getting their hands dirty installing equipment. - (Bottom Left) Travis Whitaker, Whitaker Waterscapes, demonstrates proper rock placement.



The completed pond from the Spring Build: Pond Edition in Dyerburg, TN.





Trainees gather around the display pond at the Atlantic-Oase SandBox.

Training as a Business Strategy

Modern pond contractors wear many hats: installer, biologist, technician, and customer liaison. Learning how to install advanced filtration is one thing; explaining it to a homeowner is another. Training programs that offer both technical detail and application context give contractors the language and tools to communicate value clearly and confidently.

They also reduce callbacks, increase system reliability, and open doors to service agreements that generate recurring revenue.

Looking Ahead

As filtration systems become more advanced and expectations around water quality rise, hands-on training is no longer a luxury—it's a necessity. Events like The Pond Build Spring Edition are part of a growing movement in the pond industry to raise the bar on both education and execution.

By staying current with new technologies and learning alongside peers, contractors position themselves to offer cleaner, smarter, and more sustainable solutions—today and in the seasons to come.

About the Author



Sean Bell is a pond and water feature expert with Atlantic-Oase, where he brings years of hands-on experience and industry knowledge to support contractors and distributors across North America. Known for his practical approach to sustainable pond design and maintenance, Sean leads hands-on training sessions and product demonstrations that help professionals stay ahead of industry innovations. He is passionate about helping others build more efficient, ecosystem-friendly water features using cutting-edge solutions like the Clearwater Pond System.



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Planting for *Fall* Pond Builds

Setting the Stage for Spring Success

by Andy Pollock,
Netherland Bulb

For pond builders, fall is often viewed as the closing chapter of the busy season. But when it comes to planting, it can be one of the most strategic times to lay the foundation for a thriving pondscape. Whether you're installing a new feature in September or putting the finishing touches on a fall renovation, selecting the right plantings—both aquatic and terrestrial—can ensure the pond enters winter strong and bursts back to life with vigor come spring.

Fall's cooler temperatures and more consistent rainfall reduce transplant shock and support strong root development. For both aquatic plants in the pond and ornamental selections around the perimeter, autumn is an ideal window to plant with purpose and long-term vision.



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Aquatic Plants for Fall Installation

Although many aquatic plants begin to go dormant in fall, planting hardy species during this season still offers key advantages. These plants won't bloom again until spring or summer, but their root systems will settle in before freezing temperatures arrive, making for a seamless transition into the next growing season.

Hardy Water Lilies (Nymphaea spp.): Water lilies are a staple in many pond builds. While their blooms fade in fall, their rhizomes can overwinter below the frost line. When planted in deeper water, typically 18 to 24 inches, they remain protected and reemerge in late spring with floating pads and colorful flowers.

Pickerel Rush (Pontederia cordata): A popular marginal plant, pickerel rush produces violet-blue flowers in summer. In fall, its foliage adds vertical texture, and its root system will establish well if planted before the first frost. It is ideal for shallow pond edges or shelves.

Corkscrew Rush (Juncus effusus 'Spiralis'): Known for its distinctive twisted stems, corkscrew rush remains visually interesting even into late fall. It tolerates wet conditions and cold temperatures, making it a dependable structural plant for the pond's edge.

Arrowhead (Sagittaria latifolia): With broad, arrow-shaped leaves and white flowers in summer, this native marginal plant thrives in wetland conditions. It produces tubers that overwinter below the ice line and reemerge in spring.

Water Iris (Iris laevigata, Iris pseudacorus): Irises are a classic marginal plant, blooming early in spring. Fall planting gives them time to develop strong rhizomes. Note that while Iris pseudacorus is striking, it can be invasive in some regions, so always check local guidelines before including it in your design.

Landscape Plantings Around the Pond

Fall is also an excellent time to install perennials, ornamental grasses and woody shrubs that will surround and accent the pond. These selections not only offer texture and color throughout the year but also anchor the water feature in the broader landscape. Additionally, this could be a strategic add on as part of a package.

Perennials by the Pond

Hostas: Hostas planted in fall will break dormancy early in spring, providing lush foliage in shady pondside locations.

Astilbe: Astilbe thrives in moist, partly shaded areas and adds feathery plumes of color during summer. Fall planting supports strong root development, setting the stage for fuller growth.

Ligularia: This dramatic perennial with bold foliage prefers damp conditions and performs well near shaded water features. Its large leaves provide contrast and interest as other plants begin to fade.

Ornamental Grasses

Japanese Forest Grass (Hakonechloa macra): This slow-spreading grass brightens shaded pond areas with golden



or variegated leaves. In fall, its graceful habit adds motion and texture.

Blue Fescue (Festuca glauca): A cool-season grass that holds its color well into winter, blue fescue offers low-growing, clumping structure and contrast to broader-leafed plants.

Switchgrass (Panicum virgatum): This native prairie grass reaches its peak in fall, with golden hues and seed plumes that provide winter interest. It also supports wildlife and offers erosion control on pond berms and slopes.

Shrubs and Trees

Red Twig Dogwood (Cornus sericea): Red twig dogwood's brilliant red stems stand out against a snowy backdrop, making it one of the best winter-interest shrubs for pondscapes. It thrives in moist soil and helps stabilize pond edges.

Winterberry Holly (Ilex verticillata): This deciduous holly produces striking red berries that persist into winter, offering visual appeal and bird habitat. Plant both male and female plants to ensure fruit production.

Japanese Maple (Acer palmatum): Known for its delicate structure and vibrant fall color, Japanese maple is a focal-point tree that adds elegance to pond settings year-round. Its shallow root system makes it ideal for planting near hardscapes or water features.

Practical Considerations for Fall Planting

When planting in the fall, it's important to focus on establishing root systems rather than immediate blooms or top growth. Mulching terrestrial plantings helps insulate roots and reduce frost heaving, while aquatic plants should be placed below the freeze line in your region to overwinter successfully.

Avoid planting tropical aquatic plants in the fall, as they will not survive freezing temperatures. Save water lettuce, water hyacinth and canna lilies for springtime installations.

Looking Ahead

By choosing fall-hardy plants and giving them time to establish before winter sets in, you're setting the stage for a pond that will flourish in spring. Rooted and ready, these selections will not only reduce your maintenance load during the next season but also provide your clients with a faster return on the beauty and benefits of their new pondscape.

As with any successful project, timing is everything—and when it comes to planting, fall is a season worth embracing.

About the Author



Andy Pollock, formerly of Black Bear Nursery in Clearfield, Pennsylvania, has more than 35 years of aquatic plant-growing experience. Andy is now primarily focused on advising our customers on how to be successful with water plants. He provides quality assurance during the growing season and seeks out new selections to carry for the following season. He loves to share his knowledge of all things related to plants, including perennials and bulbs, but water plants are his true passion.



Pickerel Rush (Pontederia cordata) adds vibrant pink, violet blue blooms and lush green foliage to pond edges, attracting pollinators all summer.

STRONGER TOGETHER



A Contractor Fight–inspired 'Truth Hike,' where we got real—sharing honest truths and making action plans for growth in business and life.

Highlights from the PPA Summer Retreat at Stillwater Reserve

by Ana York Arntson,
Co-Founder, Pond Professionals Alliance

This past July, 30 pond professionals from across the United States and Canada gathered for something more than just a break from work. They came together to recharge, reconnect and reignite the passion that brought them into the pond industry in the first place. The Pond Professional Alliance (PPA) Summer Retreat was held at the serene and scenic Stillwater Reserve in western Michigan, offering the perfect backdrop for three days of sunshine, learning, storytelling and meaningful connection.

What started as a simple idea — to create an opportunity for pond builders to get away and learn from each other in a relaxed setting — blossomed into something truly special: a catalyst for collaboration, personal growth and lasting friendships. Over the course of one long weekend, attendees traded ideas, shared struggles, celebrated wins and soaked in the collective wisdom of some of the most passionate and experienced individuals in the business.

A Space for Real Connection

Unlike the hustle and bustle of a trade show or the high-pressure networking of industry conventions, the PPA Summer Retreat offered an intentionally slower pace. Here, there were no booths to manage or sales pitches to deliver. Instead, there were shared meals, lakeside chats and bonfire conversations that created space for deeper, more meaningful relationships to form.

The retreat kicked off Thursday evening with a special Dress for Success dinner. Attendees dressed up for the occasion and enjoyed a steak dinner surrounded by peers who quickly began to feel more like family. It was the perfect icebreaker for a weekend centered on authenticity and mutual respect.

That spirit of camaraderie carried throughout the entire weekend. Attendees felt safe sharing both their triumphs and their trials. The conversations were honest, vulnerable and filled with insight — from how to structure pricing and handle tricky clients to balancing work demands with family life. Regardless of experience level or business size, everyone had something valuable to contribute and something meaningful to learn.

Behind the Scenes with EasyPro

Friday brought one of the most anticipated experiences of the weekend: a private tour of the EasyPro manufacturing facility. The tour began with an in-depth look at their process, from formulating high-potency water treatments to building their remarkably quiet and efficient aeration systems. The tour ended at Stoney Creek Fish Farm, where EasyPro grows fish for ponds throughout the state of Michigan.

Attendees were able to see firsthand how EasyPro's product innovation is grounded in real-world problem-solving. But it wasn't just the products that left a lasting impression — it was the people. EasyPro is an employee-owned company, and their pride of ownership shined through. President and CEO Paul Cole, along with sales specialists Matt Meachum and Jake Bradley, were on hand to guide the tour and connect with attendees on a personal level. Their genuine hospitality and willingness to answer questions with honesty, humor and insight set the tone for what would become one of the most talked-about parts of the retreat.

"The event was fantastic. I loved seeing this community come together in friendship to support one another and learn from the guest



We enjoyed steaks in the lodge during our Dress for Success dinner, as our coaches set the tone and got us inspired for the weekend ahead.



Touring the EasyPro warehouse and getting a firsthand look at their innovative Sound Shield Technology for lake aeration units.



Our field trip group was welcomed by the exceptionally friendly, knowledgeable EasyPro team—now proud employee-owners after the company's recent transition to an employee-owned model.



speakers. These events are investments in our industry's future," Cole said.

The team at EasyPro demonstrated that when innovation is paired with integrity, it strengthens not just individual businesses but the entire industry.

Education Meets Inspiration

The learning didn't stop at the tour. Friday afternoon featured a leadership session led by Tim Cutroni of The Contractor Fight, who encouraged attendees to challenge their mindsets and adopt a more empowered approach to their businesses.

Next up was Clayton Graba of Kaeru CX, who discussed the importance of using systems to scale effectively. He walked attendees through the Kaeru CX platform, showing how it can streamline day-to-day operations and reduce the chaos that often comes with growth.

Work Hard, Play Hard

Of course, it wasn't all classroom time. One of the most cherished aspects of the retreat was the balance of professional development with play and personal bonding. Friday evening brought outdoor adventures such as ATV rides, skeet shooting, golf simulators and boat rides. These activities weren't just for fun — though they certainly were — they gave attendees the chance to loosen up, laugh and bond with their peers in unforgettable ways.

Saturday morning featured the Contractor Fight-style Truth Hike, where participants walked the trails of Stillwater Reserve while sharing honest,



An evening by the fire—relaxed, connected, and at home in our community.

personal stories about their journeys in the pond world and beyond. The hike offered a beautiful and reflective backdrop for deep conversations, vulnerability and encouragement. For many, it was one of the most moving parts of the weekend.

That afternoon brought more sessions with Cutroni and Graba, offering even more practical strategies for leadership and business success. As evening rolled in, attendees gathered for one final night of connection. Around the campfire and inside the lodge, conversations flowed late into the night. People talked about life, business, family and dreams for the future.

"This was one of the best professional development events I have been to in years. The PPA thoughtfully curated an experience that sparked real connection, fresh insight and genuine renewal," said Melissa Johanson, owner of Focal Point Features.

Community Makes Us Stronger

If one theme resonated most throughout the retreat, it was this: We are better together.

The pond industry can be a lonely place. Many professionals work in isolation, facing challenges they think no one else understands. But this retreat was proof that when pond builders come together with open minds and open hearts, the impact is profound.

Platforms such as the Pond Professional Alliance are built on trust, generosity and the belief that a rising tide lifts all boats. The stronger our relationships, the stronger our businesses — and the more respected and successful the industry becomes as a whole.

Looking Ahead

The PPA Summer Retreat was more than an event — it was a movement. A movement toward deeper connection, higher standards and shared success. And it's only the beginning.

To everyone who joined us: Thank you. You brought your wisdom, your laughter, your vulnerability and your spirit. You reminded us what makes this industry not just worth working in, but worth investing in. To EasyPro: None of this would have been possible without your support. We appreciate you and your dedication to strengthening the industry.

And to those who couldn't make it: Stay tuned. We'll be back — and next time, we hope to see you there.

About the Author



Ana York Arnston is first and foremost, a compassionate homeschooling mom of four. Overcoming her initial reluctance, she played an integral role in transforming Stonebridge Pond and Waterfall Company in Austin, TX into the success it knows today. As Co-Founder of the Pond Professionals Alliance, she brings her communication skills and passion for building community connections to a larger space.



Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Key Team Members

by Frank Congilose,
CFP®, CLU, ChFC, Managing Partner and CEO, C&A Financial Group

If you've spent any time in the pond and water feature industry, you know that success is about more than pumps, liners and aquatic plants. The real engine behind every thriving pond business is its people. In today's service-driven U.S. economy, this truth is even more pronounced: your team is your most valuable asset.

For pond professionals, whether you're designing koi ponds, installing waterfalls or managing maintenance contracts, the most valuable asset isn't machinery or inventory, but the key team members who drive productivity, innovation and growth. Focusing on recruiting and retaining these individuals is essential for long-term profitability.

Why Focus on People and Productivity?

Pond businesses are built on expertise, craftsmanship and customer service. Every project is unique, and your clients rely on your team's knowledge to solve challenges and deliver beautiful, functional water features. In this environment, investing in your people—and understanding what motivates them—can help you stand out in a competitive market.

What Drives Key Team Members?

Just as every pond has its own ecosystem, every team member has unique needs and motivations. There's no one-size-fits-all answer, but understanding what drives your top talent is essential. Consider these common priorities:

Compensation: Many team members require a competitive salary to meet their living needs and maintain their quality of life.

Flexibility: Some team members may value flexible schedules, especially those balancing work with family or personal commitments.

Security: Others team members may seek job stability and clear pathways for long-term growth.

Opportunity: Eager and ambitious employees look for advancement, challenging projects and professional development.

Five Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Top Talent

So how do you attract these key team members or the "A" players that can help take your business to the next level?

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1. Get to Know Your Team: Conduct regular one-on-one meetings to understand each employee's goals and challenges. Open communication can reveal what keeps them engaged—and what might cause them to look elsewhere.

2. Offer Flexible Work Arrangements: If your installation or maintenance schedule allows, consider flexible hours or seasonal time off. This can be especially attractive during peak spring and summer months, helping to prevent burnout among skilled workers.

3. Develop a Competitive Compensation Model: Ensure that base salaries are competitive within your region and industry. Consider performance-based bonuses for team members who go above and beyond—whether it's landing a big contract or delivering exceptional client service.

4. Implement Non-Qualified Benefits: Go beyond traditional retirement plans like 401(k)s with non-qualified benefits tailored to key employees. These might include:

- Supplemental retirement benefits
- Deferred compensation
- Custom bonus structures
- Profit-sharing tied to company goals
- Succession planning for those interested in leadership

These tools help align long-term company objectives with your top employees' need for personal security and growth.

5. Align Company Goals With Individual Aspirations: Create clear pathways for advancement and professional development. Offer training on new pond technologies, certifications or leadership skills. Involve key team members in strategic planning to foster a sense of ownership and engagement.

Retention: Your Secret Weapon for the Off-Season

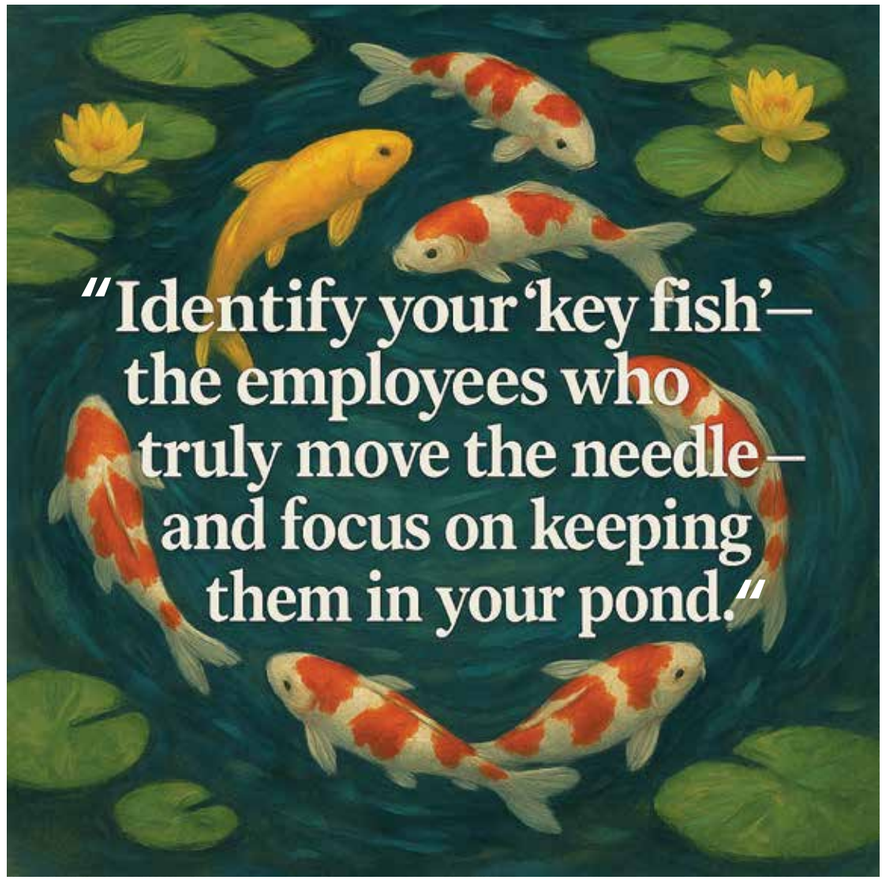
As autumn arrives and installation projects slow, your business faces a seasonal lull that can test both your bottom line and your team's morale. Retaining key team members during this time is critical for several reasons:

Knowledge and Efficiency: Experienced employees are trained in your systems and seasonal routines—from leaf removal and equipment checks to winterizing ponds. Their expertise means fewer mistakes and more efficient service.

Year-Round Revenue: With a reliable team, you can offer year-round services like fall cleanouts, equipment winterization and early spring maintenance. This helps smooth revenue dips and keeps your company top-of-mind for clients.

Spring Readiness: When spring demand returns, a well-trained team is ready to hit the ground running—saving you from costly recruiting and onboarding during your busiest season.

Employee Loyalty: Providing stability—through guaranteed winter hours, flexible schedules or off-season training—shows your team they're valued year-round, not just in peak months.



Practical Tips:

- Use slower months for staff training, equipment maintenance or planning next season's schedule.
- Offer incentives for winter retention, like end-of-season bonuses or professional development.
- Involve your team in brainstorming ways to generate off-season business.

Prioritizing retention supports your team's well-being and positions your business for smoother operations and greater long-term success.

Conclusion

In the pond and water feature industry, your greatest asset is your team. Just as you tailor each pond to your client's needs, tailor your recruitment and retention strategies to your employees' motivations.

By understanding what drives your people—whether it's compensation, flexibility, security or opportunity—you can build a business that's both profitable and sustainable. And remember: not every worker is the same. Identify your "key fish"—the employees who truly move the needle—and focus on keeping them in your pond.

About the Author



Frank Congilose is an entrepreneur, author, and CEO of C&A Financial Group. Entering the financial services industry in 1981, he quickly became known for his leadership, founding Congilose & Associates (now C&A Financial Group) in 1983 and serving as a General Agent with The Guardian since 1991. His mentorship and innovation have built a team of 30+ planners serving over 10,000 clients nationwide.A recognized industry leader and Forbes contributor, Frank has authored four books and founded The Institute of Responsible Wealth to help people achieve their ideal life. Honored by the GAMA Foundation as a "Leadership Hero," he continues to coach and inspire. A Jersey Shore native, Frank and his wife Diane have three children and eight grandchildren.



POND Trade Magazine Announces 2025 Water Artisan of the Year Contest and Esteemed Panel of Judges

POND Trade Magazine is proud to announce the return of its Water Artisan of the Year (WATY) contest for 2025—an annual celebration of the industry's most innovative and artistic water-feature creations. Known as the "Academy Awards of the Pond Industry," this prestigious competition showcases the talent, creativity, and craftsmanship of pond builders, designers, and visionaries from across the country.

Now entering its 10th year, the contest will honor excellence across multiple categories, from intimate, garden-sized water features to sprawling, resort-caliber installations. Winners will be recognized in an upcoming issue of POND Trade Magazine and will join a celebrated legacy of past honorees whose work has set new benchmarks for the industry.

This year's competition will be judged by an elite panel of water-feature experts, each bringing a unique perspective and a wealth of experience to the selection process.



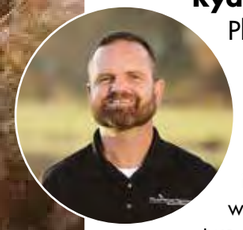
Stan Suh,
Flow Landscape

The founder of Flow Landscape in Corona, California, Stan Suh is a Master Certified Aquascape Contractor celebrated for his low-maintenance ecosystem ponds and nature-inspired designs. With more than 15 years of experience in large-scale commercial landscape construction, Stan has an unmatched ability to merge durability with beauty. Winner of the "Pondless" category in the 2024 Water Artisan of the Year competition, Stan now brings his keen technical and artistic eye to the 2025 judging table.



Kendahl Kreps,
Atlantic-Oase

Since 2013, Kendahl Kreps has served as the Director of Marketing for Atlantic-Oase, where she has shaped the brand's presence across North America. With over a decade of industry experience, Kendahl has a sharp eye for design, a talent for storytelling, and a deep appreciation for artfully executed water features. Her insight into both aesthetics and the business of water-feature creation makes her a valued addition to the judging team.



Ryan Farnol,
Platinum Ponds & Landscaping

As founder of Platinum Ponds & Landscaping in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and a Master Certified Aquascape Contractor, Ryan Farnol is known for blending artistic vision with technical precision. With nearly two decades of experience, Ryan has built a reputation for innovative designs and meticulous craftsmanship. A former 2024 Water Artisan of the Year winner himself, Ryan returns to the contest as a judge, bringing his award-winning perspective and passion for excellence to the panel.



Chris Thompson,
Just Add Water

Chris Thompson, founder of Just Add Water in Des Moines, Iowa, is a Master Certified Aquascape Contractor whose work blends beauty with functionality. Since building his first waterfall in 2005, Chris has become known for creating ponds, waterfalls, and fountains that harmonize human enjoyment with aquatic health. He earned the 2024 Water Artisan of the Year honors in the Recreational Pond category for a swim-pond that seamlessly merges koi habitat with swimming space. His creative vision and passion for client collaboration will play a central role in the judging process.



Craig McBride,
SwimPond | Pond Professionals Alliance (PPA)

Craig McBride's career in aquatic design spans decades, beginning as an aquarium hobbyist and evolving into founding All Aquatics and SwimPond.com in Texas. As Co-Founder of the Pond Professionals Alliance, Craig is a leader in industry education, standards, and collaboration. Known for spearheading large-scale, ecosystem-focused builds like the celebrated PPA Swim Pond at the 2025 Water Garden Expo, Craig's judging role reflects his dedication to innovation, mentorship, and sustainable aquatic design.



Tim Waddington,
Quality Nishikigoi | Koi Trips

Co-owner of Quality Nishikigoi, one of the UK's largest Japanese koi outlets, Tim Waddington is an accomplished pond builder and designer with more than two decades of experience in the industry. He has constructed and managed projects of all sizes, from private garden ponds to large-scale commercial installations, and is a regular contributor to koi publications on pond design and construction. With over 60 buying trips to Japan, Tim has cultivated exceptional relationships with top breeders and has supplied Grand Champion koi to major shows worldwide.

The Call for Entries

The 2025 Water Artisan of the Year contest is now open for submissions. Entries will be evaluated on design originality, execution, and the artistic integration of water into the surrounding environment. Winners will be announced in a dedicated feature in POND Trade Magazine, cementing their status among the industry's most accomplished artisans.

For official rules, category details, and entry deadlines, visit pondtrademag.com or scan the QR code to enter today!

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Introducing Pond Portals™ – Koi Pond Viewing Windows

After years of offering local expertise in pond window development, we're proud to bring Pond Portals to the greater koi community. Our small, family-owned business specializes in American-made, high-quality koi pond viewing windows.

Each kit includes a stainless-steel frame and retainer, glass, sealant, fasteners, and clear installation and maintenance instructions. Standard sizes fit block walls built from standard 8-by-16-inch blocks, with custom sizes available. All frames use factory-certified 316 stainless steel for exceptional corrosion resistance.

Unlike recessed windows, Pond Portals are built directly into the pond wall. This infinity-style design brings water right up to the glass for an unobstructed view, with smooth, flush edges to ensure koi safety.

Our patent-pending design is ideal for both DIYers and contractors, focusing on easy installation and leak resistance. Built-in anchors secure the frame into a block wall and double as watertight fasteners for the retainer. The gasketed fasteners, welded anchors, retainer, sealant, and liner work together to deliver exceptional leak protection—saving contractors time and giving DIYers confidence.

Koi are naturally drawn to the window—sometimes curious about their reflection, sometimes responding to feeding time, and often showing off their colors and patterns. Customers also report unexpected benefits:

Health monitoring – The window offers a clear view of areas often hidden from a top-down perspective, helping spot issues early.

Shelter for sick koi – The nook formed by the window provides a calm, protected spot where koi can rest away from strong currents.

We're committed to customer satisfaction and happy to offer guidance for contractors, retailers, and DIY installers. Pond Portals work with a variety of construction methods, including alternate veneer sizes and spray-in liners.

Discover why Pond Portals have become a preferred choice for pond professionals and hobbyists. Visit www.pondportals.com or email info@pondportals.com for pricing, custom orders, and quantity discounts.

Independent Lab Tests Confirm EasyPro's Pond-Vive and Blue Lake Dye Deliver Top Performance



EasyPro Pond Products has announced that two of its flagship solutions—Pond-Vive beneficial bacteria and Blue Lake Dye—have ranked highest in independent laboratory testing against other leading brands.

In a recent analysis, nine top-selling beneficial lake and pond bacteria treatments were evaluated for viable bacterial spore count, species diversity, and the presence of muck-eating enzymes. EasyPro's Pond-Vive led the field with a verified 5 billion CFU per gram, the broadest range and highest number of muck-eating bacterial species, and the most complete enzyme blend among all products tested. The company noted that these results reinforce its long-standing goal of delivering products that perform as promised, setting the standard for both performance and value in the pond and lake management industry.

In a separate spectro scan analysis, EasyPro's Blue Lake Dye was tested against five other leading blue pond dyes for concentration strength. Once again, the results demonstrated EasyPro's competitive edge, with Blue Lake Dye showing superior strength and offering contractors and lake managers a reliable, economical solution. The company said these findings validate what customers have been reporting for years—that EasyPro products consistently deliver measurable results while maximizing value.

Full details of the independent lab results can be found in the center spread of this issue of POND Trade Magazine.

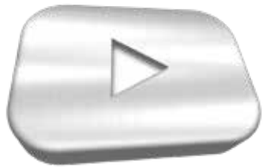
Atlantic-Oase 9th Annual Professional Conference

We're excited to announce the 9th Annual Professional Conference, taking place November 5–7, 2025, in Cleveland, Ohio! This must-attend event brings together top pond builders, landscapers, and water feature professionals from across North America for three days of hands-on learning, industry insights, awesome swag bags, great food and high-energy networking!

Attendees will enjoy exclusive first looks at 2026 Atlantic-Oase products, classes specializing in advanced filtration, water feature design, best installation practices, and business development workshops hosted by industry professionals tailored to help you grow!

To top it off, attendees will receive tickets to the legendary Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, a fitting celebration for an event built to inspire, educate, and connect the water feature community. Whether you're looking to sharpen your skills, grow your business, or simply connect with the best in the business, this event is truly Built to Rock! Register now at: www.atlantic-oase.com/conference





Aquascape Inc. Earns Fourth YouTube Silver Play Button

Aquascape Inc., the world's leading innovator in water features, has reached a new digital milestone as its Aquascape Ponds YouTube channel surpassed 100,000 subscribers, earning the platform's prestigious Silver Play Button award. This marks the fourth Silver Play Button for the company's network of channels dedicated to inspiring and educating viewers about water gardening.

Aquascape now holds Silver Play Buttons for:

- Greg Wittstock, The Pond Guy — Founder and CEO Greg Wittstock shares his passion for ponds with behind-the-scenes footage of builds worldwide.
- TEAM Aquascape — Following the daily adventures of Aquascape's construction crew, from installations to global travel.
- Ed The Pond Professor — Led by Ed Beaulieu, offering expert insights and the science behind water features.
- Aquascape Ponds — The newest honoree, featuring how-to videos, customer stories, product tutorials, and inspiration for pond owners.

"This is an exciting moment for our team," Wittstock said. "Each Silver Play Button represents a community of passionate pond lovers. We're honored to connect more people to water the way nature intended."

With over 1 million subscribers across its YouTube network, Aquascape continues to lead the water feature industry through innovative products, sustainable design, and engaging multimedia content.

For more information, visit aquascapeinc.com.

A Pond Shop Reinvented: Koi & More Charts a New Course

Chicago's North Shore has long been home to passionate pond enthusiasts, but few realize they have access to one of the region's best-kept secrets. Koi & More Pond Shop in Highland Park, Illinois, blends traditional pond-keeping wisdom with modern business innovation, serving seasoned ponders and introducing newcomers to the hobby. Under new ownership, Koi & More proudly continues to support, supply, and provide services to the Chicagoland area.

The Acquisition Journey

Three years ago, with two decades of experience in landscaping, construction, and business operations, we discovered a true diamond in the rough. What drew us to this Highland Park treasure wasn't just its potential, but its foundation of knowledge and community trust.

The shop came with decades of pond-keeping expertise—fish behavior, water chemistry, and the delicate art of ecosystem balance. We knew this was more than a retail purchase; it was becoming stewards of a legacy connecting generations of pond lovers who value both skill and passion for aquatic life.

Transforming the Experience

Our first priority was expanding our physical offerings to inspire both veteran keepers and beginners. We upgraded our livestock capabilities, bringing in premium large koi that serve as centerpieces for collectors. Our inventory grew to include advanced filtration, comprehensive water treatments, premium fish foods, and professional-grade equipment.

Recognizing that plants are the living artwork of any pond, we partnered with quality growers to offer a wide variety of tropical and hardy aquatic plants. Most importantly, we expanded into full pond services—construction, repairs, maintenance, and koi health consultations—positioning ourselves as a complete pond solution provider.

Growing Online

While honoring traditional methods, we embraced digital integration to share knowledge and serve customers nationwide. Our growing online platform offers the same quality products and personalized guidance our local customers trust, extending our expertise far beyond Highland Park.

Looking Ahead

Our mission remains clear: preserve the core principles of pond keeping while embracing innovation to serve the next generation. Whether customers hand-select koi in our shop or seek guidance online, they experience our commitment to quality, knowledge, and care—ensuring this wonderful hobby thrives for years to come.

Midsouth Ponds to Host Immersive Retreat for Pond Professionals

Midsouth Ponds has announced its upcoming Midsouth Ponds Retreat, an all-inclusive, hands-on event for pond professionals and industry innovators, set for November 9–13, 2025, in Stanton, Tennessee. The retreat will offer an opportunity for attendees to engage in intensive learning, networking, and business development.

The retreat promises a rich blend of practical training and strategic growth opportunities. Attendees can participate in hands-on builds with leading pond manufacturers, attend expert-led workshops and product showcases, and explore innovative ideas for water feature construction and maintenance. A special business coaching segment, aimed at helping participants double their income, will be led by acclaimed speaker and business strategist Steve Rozenberg, who will bring his expertise in scaling operations and building successful service-based companies.

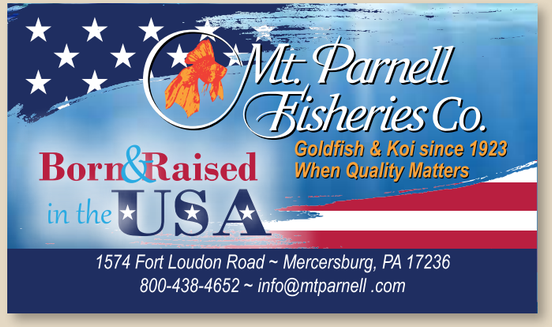
Evenings will be filled with entertainment and networking, including the "Casino Night" fundraiser benefiting Live Like Jett. The schedule offers VIP access on November 9–10, followed by general admission programming from November 10–13.

"This event is about bringing pond pros together to learn from one another, experience the latest in pond technology, and leave inspired to take their businesses to the next level," said Bubba Hogan, event organizer.

With daily educational sessions, manufacturer product demonstrations, and dedicated time for industry relationship building, the Midsouth Ponds Retreat is positioned to be a must-attend event for anyone serious about growing their skills and their business in the pond and water feature industry.

For more information and to register, visit: www.midsouthpondretreat.com.

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- Tuesday, November 18, 2025 - Friday, November 21, 2025
- Tuesday, February 24, 202 - Friday, February 27, 2026

SESSION 2: WATER GARDEN SYSTEMS, MAINTENANCE & BIOLOGY
- Tuesday, December 9, 2025 - Friday, December 12, 2025
- Tuesday, March 10, 2026 - Friday, March 13, 2026

SESSION 3: ADVANCED SYSTEMS & FILTRATION
- Tuesday, January 13, 2026 - Friday, January 16, 2026
- Tuesday, March 24, 2026 - Friday, March 27, 2026

SESSION 4: FOUNTAINS & FORMAL SPILLWAYS FOR THE HARDSCAPE
- Tuesday, January 27, 2026 - Friday, January 30, 2026
- Tuesday, February 10, 2026 - Friday, February 13, 2026

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