

Don't Release Non-native Species!



Water Gardeners

Pondscapes, water gardens, and ornamental garden pools are becoming increasingly popular in the United States. Water gardens have a centuries' old history in the Orient and a soothing quality that is enhanced by the ever-changing beauty they provide. While the constantly shifting scene of fish, plants, reptiles, amphibians, and reflections on the water make water gardening a rewarding and fulfilling hobby, certain precautions should be taken in order to maintain the surrounding native environment.

Did you know that your water garden may be harboring a plant or animal that if misused could cause harm? Most plants and animals used in water gardens are non-native species such as milfoil or koi. A non-native species is any plant or animal that is found outside its natural range. Some gardeners release their plants and animals because they can no longer maintain the water garden; they may have lost interest in the garden; or the plant or animal has outgrown the garden. Whatever the reason, releasing any plant or animal into local waters such as rivers, lakes, ponds, and even drainage ditches is not a good idea.

It Isn't Good for Your Plant\Animal - Although you may think you are doing the plant or animal a favor by releasing it, you are more likely condemning it to death. Non-native species often die soon after release because they are not able to function in their new environment. They commonly die due to predation, starvation, temperature extremes, parasites or diseases.

It Isn't Good For Us or the Environment - Once established, non-native species are difficult, if not impossible to control or eradicate. These foreigners compete with native species for habitat and food, transmit parasites or diseases, and they have been known to adapt by hybridizing with native species. Forms of carp, such as koi and goldfish, are popular water garden fish whose method of feeding causes the water to become cloudy, disrupting the natural habitat.

Water hyacinth, water milfoil, parrot's feather and water lily are common water garden plants which have become ecological problems when released. Once established, these plants can decrease native plant diversity and degrade water quality.

Alternatives to Release - Here are alternative means for disposing of unwanted water garden plants and animals.

- Return the animals to a local water garden shop or pet store for resale or trade.
- Give the plants and animals to another water garden hobbyist.
- Donate the animals and plants to a larger water garden which can be found in public parks, hotel lobbies, mall courtyards, restaurants, professional offices, museums, schools, nursing homes, and hospitals.

If these options are not available for disposing of an unwanted water garden animal or plant, consider ending its life humanely.

- A veterinarian or fishery biologist can euthanize it (put it to sleep) with anesthesia. You can also do this at home by placing the animal (fish, amphibian, or reptile) in a container of water and putting it into the freezer. Because cold is a natural anesthetic, this is considered a very humane method of euthanasia.
- Dispose of water garden plants simply by leaving them in the sun to dry and then using it in the yard as mulch or compost.

If you must give up your water garden plants or animals, consider their well-being as well as the potential impact on the environment. Please do not release any water garden plant or animal into local waters.

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