



WATER
GARDENING
SERIES

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Water Garden Plants

A varied selection of plants has impact of not only on the beauty of a pond also on the water quality. There are four basic types of pond plants. For an attractive, well-balanced pond, we recommend using a mixture of all four types. Below you will find a description of the different categories of plants and the ways in which each group will assist you in maintaining a healthy environment.

Marginal

The largest palette of plants falls within this group. These plants grow in shallow water or saturated soil around the perimeter of ponds or along the banks of streams. They frame the water feature, soften the transition between land and water, and provide an attractive backdrop to small ponds. Their function in the pond is primarily ornamental. However, if you grow marginal [plants in mesh baskets filled with gravel or aquatic soil, their hungry roots will grow out of the containers and pull planting beds into the pond. This creates natural bio-bogs within the pond, which remove nutrients and provide an expanded area for beneficial bacteria to colonize.

Submerged Oxygenators

This group of plants grows beneath the surface of the water where most or all of their foliage remains. The name "Oxygenator" is used because they release oxygen into the water during the day. The primary function of these plants is to remove excess nutrients from the pond, thereby reducing the growth of algae. They also provide spawning areas and protective cover for fish. Most of these plants are grassy in form and sold in tied bunches. The most popular native submerged grass, Horwatt (*Ceratophyllum demersum*), can be either be free floating or anchored in a pot of gravel. Additional favorite potted oxygenators are two varieties of Arrowhead (*Sagittaria natans* and *S. graminea*) and Tapegrass (*Vallisneria sp.*).

Floaters

These plants float freely on the surface and reduce algae by competing for nutrients, shading the water to cool it and lowering the light penetration. Most floaters are tropical and those should be removed from the pond and composted prior to the onset of winter. The most popular floater is the Water Hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*). This rapidly multiplying plant develops a strong trailing root system, which removes excess nutrients and pollutants from the pond. Due to their natural filtering ability, they are commonly used for water purification at treatment plants in southern states. Occasionally hyacinths will develop a lovely orchid-like flower. Other popular floaters are Water Lettuce (*Pista stratooides*), Frogbit (*Limnobium spongia*), and the tiny floating plants, Duckweed (*Lemna minor*) and Azolla (*Azolla sp.*).

Submerged Floating-Leaved Plants

The primary benefit derived from floating-leaved plants is the surface shade they provide. The plants root on the bottom of the pond and send floating leaves up to the surface. Everyone's favorite pond plant, the water lily is in this group. You can keep water lilies in pots or build planting beds right into the bottom of the pond. Water lilies grow in water up to 3 feet in depth. Most water lilies are happiest at depths no more than 18 inches to 2 feet. At depths the sunlight penetration is better and the water is warmer. There are also miniatures, which can grow in as little as 8 inches of water but must be moved to deeper parts of the pond for winter.