

Instead of Mowing Lawns:



Pond & Waterfall Gardens

Photographs by Mike Davis Words by Gloria Hildebrandt

An escape beckons in your own back yard if you have a pond or waterfall. The sight or sound of water on a hot, humid day can be as refreshing as a tall iced drink. Any cares or stress seem to wash away, leaving you relaxed and soothed. While some people get to experience this only after driving to a cottage, the fortunate ones have water on or close to their own properties. When it isn't there by nature, it's possible to create the water feature of your dreams.

Last July, homeowners in the Golden Horseshoe opened their yards and gardens to the public for the second Pond Tour for Hospice. Two hospices benefited from the fundraiser, the Dr. Bob Kemp Hospice of Hamilton and McNally House Hospice of Grimsby. There were 23 properties to choose from on this self-guided tour, with locations in Ancaster, Burlington, Dundas, Grimsby, Hamilton, Millgrove and Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Here are some views of only a few of the pond gardens that participated last year. For information on this year's tour, see www.pondtourforthehospice.ca, email pondtour2012@gmail.com or call 1-866-270-7663. **EV**

Harry and Nancy DeVries of Grimsby, owners of Cole's Pond Store, have a large and colourful pond garden in front of their rural house. A patio at their front door looks onto a large pond and four small waterfalls. Large rocks edge the pond, stepping stones through thyme form a path through plants and birdsong is heard even on a hot day.

"To create a pond, remember this five-part recipe:

1. Rocks and gravel
2. Plants
3. Fish
4. Mechanical and biological filtration
5. Re-circulating system with the proper sized pump.

Always make the feature 1 1/2 to two times larger than you think. Countless times we have had customers saying they wished they made their pond bigger."

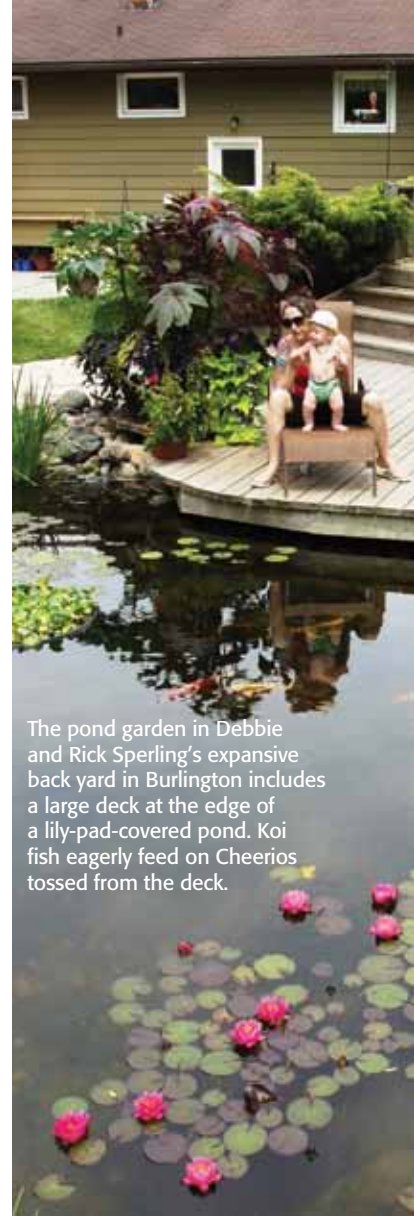
Dave DeVries, Cole's Pond Store, Grimsby

Photos for this feature were taken with this equipment on loan from Sony of Canada: Sony A55 camera, Carl Zeiss 16-80 mm lens, HVL-58 flash unit.

Instead of Mowing Lawns: Pond & Waterfall Gardens



Harry DeVries, owner of Cole's Pond Store, stands in the pond garden outside Cole's Christmas Cottage in Grimsby. Mature plants almost hide the two ponds and waterfalls. Son Dave, who also works at the store, says "We want to show people what you can do instead of having a lawn."



The pond garden in Debbie and Rick Sperling's expansive back yard in Burlington includes a large deck at the edge of a lily-pad-covered pond. Koi fish eagerly feed on Cheerios tossed from the deck.



Two visitors on the footbridge study the waterfall dropping into the rear part of the pond in the Sperlings' back yard. A red rose blooms at the top of the falls and flowers, grasses, shrubs and bushes in a variety of colours add to the beauty.

Patrick Smith and Mary-Frances Fox own a house on a busy street in downtown Hamilton, with a waterfall in their back yard. Stones direct the flow into two streams, screening the noise of traffic. A wood chip path surrounds the pond and leads to a small stony beach with an inviting teak deck chair. Despite vehicles passing out front and houses surrounding the yard, this is a quiet, peaceful place. A shady garden and patio fills the generous space along the side of the house.





Stepping into this garden at the back of Carole and Peter O'Brien's house in downtown Hamilton is like entering another world. Beyond the hanging planter is a small pond and waterfall. A wide walkway leads to several seating areas among mature plants. Padded benches have been placed in arbours to give good views of the garden. Art sculpture is tucked among the plants and bright flags flutter in the slightest breeze.



"Adding a water garden to your yard can transform your outdoor living space into an area where you can relax, unwind and enjoy your surroundings while de-stressing from your busy life. Water features become the focal point of your garden, providing an interesting backdrop attracting a wide variety of birds and butterflies, while the soothing sounds of water also drown out noise from traffic and nearby neighbours."

Valerie Stensson, Sheridan Nurseries, Georgetown

"Buy the right equipment for the size of your pond and the water feature you want to achieve. A properly balanced pond will have a good mechanical and biological filter in conjunction with an ultraviolet sterilizer. Keeping your pond beautiful will be easier if you remember that a pond is a closed-in water environment, and maintaining good water quality will help your pond life flourish throughout the year. A good pressure filter will be invaluable in maintaining a well-balanced pond. It carries all the filtering components in one canister and can be the heart of your pond."

Mario Visca, Big Al's Aquarium Supercentres & Pet City, Hamilton

"A properly built water feature should take about five to 15 minutes weekly to maintain. There is also the option of a pondless waterfall, which is a waterfall stream with no pond. This requires little to no maintenance."

Melanie Downes, Clearwater Ponds, Burlington

"Don't fall in love with fish and don't name them. You are bound to lose some and there could be heartbreak. They're not pets.

I recommend a medium to large water feature. A big ecosystem takes care of itself.

Be careful how big you make your waterfall. Sound travels far and big pumps can annoy neighbours.

Have the water visible from house windows and have lights for the water in the dark."

Sam Harper, Harper's Garden Centre, Ancaster

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A short dock gives a good view of the pond and its goldfish and catfish. Owner Peter O'Brien explains that he and Carole took possession of the property in January 2011. The pond had been professionally built for the previous owners. "I wasn't a gardener before," says O'Brien, "but I sure am now."



Barbara Kerr and her partner Urmas Soomet helped to create a wildlife pond on their rural Millgrove property, that is now home to fish, turtles, herons, wood ducks, hooded mergansers, blackbirds, deer, coyotes and more. When they moved in and saw standing water over a low part of land behind their house, they eventually had the area excavated. Natural springs fed the pond and all sorts of wildlife were drawn to it. Now there is a wood duck nest box that has been used successfully, and native wildflower seeds are growing into established plants. Kerr calls their property "our hearts' delight."



The lower pond of the Stopps-Ouellette water feature contains smaller fish than the large koi that inhabit the upper pond. Frogs and toads share the space.



One of the largest waterfalls on the tour was in the garden of Arlene Stopps and Jim Ouellette of Dundas. A large upper pond spills over into three waterfalls that end in a lower pond. Built entirely by themselves, the pond stream circulates between a large round patio and the house, which has a large upper deck ideal for viewing the water below. "It's an ecosystem by itself," says Stopps. "Once a week, Jim takes care of the water. I just do all the gardening."



"We gave away our lawnmower," says Smith. A large pond and deck completely fill the back yard where before there was just grass. At four feet deep at the deepest part, this urban pond is swimmable.