

Ponderings...

Newsletter of the Central Iowa Water Garden Association www.ciwga.org vol. 5 no. 1 January 2005



Lilypad

CIWGA will meet **Monday, January 10**, at 7:00 pm in the Hughes Auditorium at Reiman Gardens. Rob Pritchard and Weston Wunder of Liquid Landscape Designers will present a program on "Pondless Waterfalls". More information on this program can be found in *Ribbiting Report*. A map to Reiman Gardens is included in this newsletter.

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The **Top of Iowa Chapter** will meet **Monday, January 17**, at 7:00 pm, at the Bob Bartlett Farm at 12136 Lark Ave. (or County Road S34). The program will be about starting plants from seeds and other valuable information about getting our gardens going in the spring.

The **Capital City Chapter** will meet **Tuesday, January 25**, at 7pm at the ISU extension office, NE 14th. Andy Doll, Tetra products representative, will talk about new products and answer questions.

More details of the chapters can be found inside in *Chapter Channels*.

Ribbiting Report

I first want to remind everyone about the Water Garden Symposium on March 14. It is the most exciting event that we have ever planned for water gardeners. The presenters and the presentations are the best that the industry has

continued...

We greatly appreciate the Fountains' support of our organization. We also appreciate our members respecting the wishes of the retailers by asking for discounts *only* for the specified items. Our list of Fountains of Support can be found on page seven.



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Ribbiting Report...

to offer. Reiman Gardens will have to limit the number of people that can attend due to seating capacities of the Hughes Auditorium. Landscapers and gardeners that are attending the Shade Tree Short Course are getting the information in the mail about the same time that you are receiving this newsletter. In other words do not delay in signing up. Contact Reiman Gardens to register - remember that CIWGA members are getting a substantial discount off the registration fee. For more information, please refer to our last newsletter.

This month and this year marks our 4 year anniversary. When looking over the membership list is it interesting to see the large number of charter members that have been with the organization since the beginning. Congratulations to those members as well as to the members that have joined since. To be a member and especially, to be a charter member, of any successful organization is something to be really proud of.

What is the value of a membership in CIWGA? Well, let me point it out to everyone even though some of these may be obvious.

- Monthly presentations with an expert explaining, in laymen's terms, the way to build a pond or water garden. Or, maybe the subject is how to open or close a pond. Lighting for your water garden, or an expert on Japanese Gardens may speak. Koi or other kinds of fish may be the subject of the month. New products to enhance the beauty of your pond or water garden are introduced. The subject matter is varied. Meetings are free to members and guests are also welcome. Refreshments, contributed by volunteers, are served at each meeting.
- Perhaps the most important aspect of being a member is knowing that if anything new that will be of help to water gardeners, comes along - you will be the first to know what it is. This has happened on several occasions already and you were the first to know.
- Of course, your 10 percent discount at area retailers. This in itself is worth the cost of the membership. I cannot figure out why anyone would let their membership lapse just because of this.
- Another benefit of membership that I want to highlight is knowing that you support the hobby of water gardening. To this I say Thank You. Then there are there are those retailers that offers us discounts. These businesses really support our hobby and are not "just-in-it-for-the-money". I know that our membership really do benefit from having a source of qual-

ity merchandise, fish and plants. There is no way that I do business with any that are not supporters of CIWGA.

- Of course, our newsletter is also a conduit for information about the hobby of water gardening. We are committed on providing a quality newsletter with quality information.

What else can I say? Everybody that has a water garden or water feature should be member - hands down!!

Our program for this month is Rob Pritchard and Weston Wunder of Liquid Landscape Designers. They are going to be going over on how to install a type of water feature called a "Pondless Waterfall". It is the only type of water feature that is absolutely safe for children but yet you still have the great sound of water. It is the "rage" right now. This type of feature has been around awhile but has not been marketed very well. They will be combining this talk with a way to install a wetland in your landscape. There are some similarities between the two. You will need to come to figure out how.

Rob and Weston are without a doubt a couple of the best installers in Iowa. You will be hearing a how to session from the best. There is little more that I can say other than, that I have recommended them many times and each job that they do is very good quality. It will be a great presentation.

The program and meeting is on Monday, January 10, 2005 at Reiman Gardens. It will be in the Hughes Auditorium and start at 7:00 PM sharp and will be over at 9:00 PM. Rob and Weston are only an example of the quality of experts that we provide our membership.

Hope to see everyone there. I might mention that we will have registration forms for the Water Garden Symposium at the meeting.

The Big Toad, Jamie



Membership renewals should be sent to our new membership chairperson Carol Scheid, 68065 180th Street, Nevada, IA 50201.

Chapter Channels

Capital City Chapter

Currently planned meetings for 2005:

Tues., January 25, 7pm

ISU extension office NE 14th

Andy Doll, Tetra products representative, will talk about new products and answer questions

Tues., February 22, 7pm

ISU extension office NE14th

Rob Prichard, Liquid Landscapes, will talk about waterfalls

Wed., March 23, 7pm

ISU extension office NE14th

Dave Rowe, Iowa Outdoor Products, will talk about hardscaping, and planting around the pond. He will bring samples of some of their rock products and show some slides.

Robin Wineland is the new secretary for the chapter.

Top of Iowa

The Top of Iowa Water Garden Association will meet Monday, January 17 at the Bob Bartlett Farm. Bob is a Master Gardener and has a unique barn to show off and this is where the meeting will be held. The program will be about starting plants from seeds and other valuable information about getting our gardens going in the spring. The directions to his place is as follows: The address is 12136 Lark Ave. (or County Road S34). It is the first place north of Burchinal on the West side of the road. Or if you are coming from the south it is 4 1/2 miles south of Thomas Machine Co. on Hwy 106 between Clear Lake and Mason City. The meeting will begin at 7:00 p.m. See You There!

A Stone's Throw

For Newsletter Articles:

You can contact me by e-mail at news@ciwga.org or by postal mail at CIWGA, c/o Lisa Harmison, 2042 South 500th Avenue, Ames, IA 50014. Material (written stories and photographs) sent by regular mail will be returned. **Deadline for February issue is January 20.**

Water Feature...

Who's on pHirst?

By Bob Passovoy, Midwest Pond & Koi Society

Editor's note: I found this online at this website: <http://www.mpks.org/articles/index.htm>

Alright, keep your hands on the newsletter. Step away from the door and sit down. Do not run away. We are your friends, and a discussion of pH is not going to hurt you. Much.

Every time pH is mentioned in ponding circles, especially in print, the sound of eyeballs glazing over is well-nigh deafening. I don't know why this is, but it seems to be one of the hardest things to explain in any fashion that leaves the listener (or reader) conscious and mentating. I've seen definitions involving ions and balances and atoms of hydrogen and oxygen. I've seen demonstrations of formulas worthy of Einstein and Planck at their most opaque, but I don't know that I've seen much that was useful for the average backyard ponder.

I guess the best way to start is with some generalizations. These are not necessarily the total truth, but as a very wise man once said, they are very useful lies.

- Every pond exists with a balance of acid and alkali (base) components as constituents of the soup that we call pond water.
- Acids are things like lemon juice, vinegar, and the stuff inside your stomach.
- Alkalis are things like quicklime, cement and bicarbonate.
- Both, in high concentrations, can eat holes in things. (Did you really need to know that? No, but it's fun, so I said it anyway.)
- Both are present to one degree or another in our pond water, and are either a part of the water itself or of the minerals (or pollutants!) dissolved in the water.
- If you have equal amounts of acid and base in your water, these balance out and this state is called "neutrality".
- pH is a convenient way of measuring this balance, with a pH of 7 reflecting the neutral state. Numbers less than 7 indicate a more acid state, and those above 7 a more alkaline condition.
- pH changes are logarithmic (don't panic!) To quote Norm Meck, my Chemistry guru, each unit of change is 10 times more than the previous one. pH 8 has 10 times more base than pH 7, and pH 9 has 10 times more base than pH 8

Water Feature...

(100 times more than pH 7!). The same is true for acid at pH values below 7. pH 6 has 10 times more acid than pH 7, and so on.

- Dissolved materials, such as ammonia, are affected by the pH balance in our ponds, and their ability to harm our fish depends on the pH level.
- The bacteria in our filters function best within a narrow range of pH, and sudden changes, especially in the acidic direction (low pH) can wipe out our bioconverters.
- Koi are tolerant of a wide range of pH, as long as it is stable.

There, that didn't hurt too much, did it?

It isn't really necessary to completely understand every nuance of the chemistry and physics of pH, but it is important to be able to measure it accurately on a regular basis, to understand the importance of maintaining a stable pH, and the consequences of failing to do so.

Measuring pH

A trip to any pet supply store will present you with a number of choices of pH kits. These range from little bits of paper only one step removed from the litmus paper you played with in science class, to tablets in little indestructible foil pouches, to bottles of mysterious fluids. Regardless of which you buy, a few things need to be considered before you plunk down your money.

1. Is the kit you are buying sensitive in the range you need? Ideally, ponds should operate in near-neutral water conditions (7.0-8.5). In reality water pH can vary anywhere between 6 and 8.5 and still be perfectly healthy. The pH can vary with time of day, water source, additives, pollutants, plantings and a host of other influences. As long as the changes are gradual, koi tend to be pretty tolerant. Bio-converting bacteria tend to lose efficiency at low pH, and pH above 9 is thought to damage koi kidneys. Many pH test kits vary in accuracy and are accurate in only a specific range of pH. A kit with a very wide range may not give accurate readings in the range you need. A very accurate kit within a narrow range of pH won't let you know if you are in trouble outside that range. In general, any kit that will give you easy-to-detect color changes in a range between 5 and 10 ("wide-range") is satisfactory for pond use. For those of us with color-blindness or a need for micro-management, electronic pH meters are available. These require frequent calibration and maintenance and

are often fragile. The average Joe Ponder need not make this investment.

2. Are your reagents fresh? Testing materials bought from pet supply stores are often ordered months in advance, and can sit in storage areas (often without temperature or moisture protection) for weeks to months. Before that, they can reside in warehouses for as long or longer. Even specialty suppliers have been known to send old and inaccurate reagents to hobbyists. Your best bet is to order from a supplier with a good reputation for reliable reagents and a mechanism for tracking lots of reagents by date of manufacture. Most pH kits have a shelf life of about two years. After that they should be replaced.

3. Is the kit easy to use? Complicated testing procedures will discourage you from keeping up with your monitoring program. Most good pH reagent kits are one-step and can be read almost immediately. Any kit with instructions written in english as translated from the original Japanese by a native Tagalog-speaking Scotsman should be gently replaced on the rack, as should any kit that requires endless shaking of an insoluble and indestructible tablet.

4. Will the kit last the season? Many reagents are sensitive to deterioration by moisture, heat and/or sunlight. Make sure your kit is appropriately packaged and the quantities are sufficient to last you long enough to make the purchase worth your while. If you are buying paper strips, for instance, water-tight packaging is a must!

5. Why do I have to measure pH, anyway? Ah, now. On to the next section.

Maintaining stable pH

pH is not a fixed value in any pond. It is a constantly changing dynamic balance between acid and base that can be affected by a multitude of environmental influences. Without some stabilizing mechanism, pH can vary widely and rapidly, not a good thing for the fish or the filter. What keeps this from happening is the presence of dissolved salts of magnesium, calcium and other minerals which are capable of swapping acid and base components within the pond environment. These are present in most water sources, so that frequent water changes can replenish these salts, which are broken down and consumed by organic acids produced by common pond bacteria. If you think of these salts as a big sponge, sopping up the acids

Water Feature

produced by rainfall, fish, bacteria and other sources, and minimizing the effect the added acids have on the pond environment, you are close enough to the truth to make it useful. We call this "pH cushion" a buffer, we measure it as alkalinity, and the action of alkalinity on a pond is its buffering capacity.

The term we use for the strength of this protection against pH shift is Alkalinity, measured in parts per million (ppm), and test kits, subject to the same questions and requirements as your pH kit, are widely available. Ideal alkalinity is around 100 ppm; a range of 50-200 is acceptable for most ponds. This means your test kit will need a range of 0-200 to be useful.

Attempts to change pond pH rapidly by the addition of acid or alkali directly to the water usually result in major stress to the fish and filter. As long as the pH is stable, ranges of pH between 6 and 8.5 are well-tolerated, and it is a better idea to find ways of stabilizing your pH. This is actually fairly easy to do by watching your alkalinity, and supplementing it if necessary. Supplements can be as simple as a few limestone flags, or if a more rapid correction is needed, a "biscuit" of plaster of Paris placed in the pond and replaced as it is consumed works well. Emergency corrections of alkalinity can be made with simple Arm & Hammer baking soda (pure sodium bicarbonate).

So... What if I Don't?

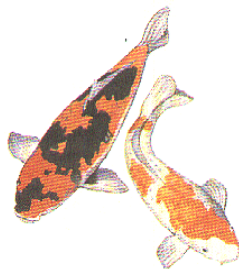
Wide shifts in pH over short periods of time are stressful to both fish and filters. Water that is very alkaline (pH 9.0) has been suspected of damaging koi kidneys. Since the addition of acids to ponds is very tricky, a water source that is less alkaline may be preferable.

Sudden reductions in pond pH can occur in liner ponds without access to rock or other sources of salts, as alkalinity is consumed by the production of organic acids, reducing its buffering capacity. When this happens, the pH can drop suddenly and without warning, a phenomenon called a "pH crash", which can drop the pond pH to 5 or less. Since the bio-converting bacteria in your filters lose efficiency at pH below 6, acid conditions of this intensity essentially turn off your filter's ability to process the ammonia your fish are still making. It will now take weeks to get it back, since very low pH will kill a significant portion of your bacterial population. Your fish are protected in the short run because ammonia becomes ionized at low pH, and is considerably less toxic. Trying to correct the pH towards neutral without first binding the ammonia with an additive will de-ionize the ammonia and kill the fish.

Overall, weekly monitoring of pH and alkalinity, and supplementing the alkalinity as needed, can save you a lot of trouble and heartbreak, and get you that much closer to an ideal pond.

Learn about Koi

About 5 or 6 of Eastern Iowa Pond Society members are going to do some advance Koi care meetings through out this winter. Probably 2 or 3 meetings in January and maybe a couple in Feb. Probably on Sunday afternoons. Most likely in Cedar Rapids. These are very informal and may be either at someone's house where we can do hands on handling of fish or at some place where we can talk over breakfast or lunch. We hope to cover topics like Koi classifications, how to pronounce



Japanese terms, and how to buy small Koi, Koi health issues including parasite identification, water quality issues, using a microscope to do scrapes, and wound dressing. Any one that is interested in participating is asked to call or email me, so I can fill in the details as I begin to organize this all. We already have some real fish savvy people that are going to participate, so this is a good chance to compare notes or learn more about our beloved pets. If you have questions please call 319-934-3665 or email Cedarserviceja@aol.com

Jackie Allsup, Eastern Iowa Pond Society

Howdy Ponder,

The Central Iowa Water Gardening Association (CIWGA) is about to begin its fourth year of existence. We have grown rapidly in this time to include over 250 members around the state and three chapters. We have also gone through some growing pains as we try to organize ourselves to reach the needs and interests of all our members.

To this end, we will be focusing on making the website (www.ciwga.org) and newsletter better for you. We will be including more photographs, illustrations, and pond information. Fish, plants, and pond material and maintenance will be topics covered in upcoming newsletters, as well as how to handle different situations and prevent possible problems. Whether you have a container water feature or a large pond you can boat in or are just thinking about water gardening, we will try to provide you with useful information. To help accomplish this goal, I am interested in possible topics and any pictures you have to share with fellow ponders. You have a wealth of knowledge and it is worth sharing!

Another one of our goals is to get the membership directory updated and online. This database will be available for paid members only and will not

be shared with anyone else. You also have the option to not be included in the directory. As we go online, it is important for our membership list to be as accurate as possible. With the changes on the Board of Directors, the renewal notifications are behind. Please check the expiration date on your mailing label and renew if you are past due. Please include the renewal form so that we can confirm that the information we have is correct. If you do not wish to be included in the directory, we still need current information so that you continue to receive the newsletter. Checks should be made out to CIWGA and sent to our new membership chairperson, Carol Scheid, at the address below.

If you have any suggestions, criticisms, comments, topic ideas or articles, and/or photographs to share, please either e mail them to me or send them to me by regular mail to the address below. We are trying to do our best but we need your help to know how we are doing!

Thank you and happy ponding,
Lisa Harmison, Website and newsletter editor
2042 South 500th Avenue
Ames, IA 50014
news@ciwga.org

Membership Renewal

Annual dues are \$15.00 for an individual, \$25.00 for a family membership. Please send your check payable to CIWGA to Carol Scheid, 68065 180th Street, Nevada, IA 50201

Name(s):

Address:

City, State , Zip:

Phone:.....

E-mail:

Renewal number (if known):_____ Include in directory:_____

I'd like the monthly newsletter sent via (circle your choice) postal mail email both.

Chapter: Story County ____ Capital City Chapter ____ Top of Iowa ____

Fountains of Support

CIWGA appreciates the support of these retailers and hopes to continue the positive benefits of this program for all. Members are asked to please respect the wishes of these retailers and this organization by following the rules as stated. How the program works:

1. A 10% discount is given to all active CIWGA members (active members are current in their dues) at the listed retailers.

2. Members must show their current membership cards to the Fountains to obtain the discount.

3. Discount applies **only on specified items - no exceptions**. Retailers reserve the right to refuse any discount.

Ames Landscape and Nursery, 4320 Hwy 69 South, Ames, 515-232-2840 -- 10% discount.

Ark Pet Center, 118 Hayward Avenue, Ames, 515-292-4646 -- Monthly specials in addition to 10% discount on everything else.

Aqualand, 3600 6th Avenue (6th and Euclid), Des Moines, 515-283-0300, www.aqualand-petsplus.com -- 10% discount.

Copyworks Plus, 105 Welch Avenue, Ames, 515-292-3630 -- 10% off all copy services.

Dillon Plant Company, Craig Jacobson, 2554 Dillon Road, Marshalltown, 641-479-2632 -- Dwarf conifers, hostas, daylilies, ornamental grasses. Open by appointment.

Earl May Garden Center, 1601 S. Kellogg, Ames, 515-232-2929 -- Everything 10% discount except for the dog and cat food plus monthly in-store specials for an additional discount.

Earl May Nursery and Garden Center, Scott Bradham, 168 South 25th Street, Ft. Dodge, 515-576-4231 -- 10% discount .

Escapes Water Creations, Carol and Randy Best, 107 E. Meadow Lane, Marshalltown, 641-753-7750 -- M-F 9-6, Sat. 9-3, 10% discount on retail items, excluding custom installation and already discounted items.

Happy Acres Nursery, Mary Fisk, 2012 Hwy 9, Osage, 641-732-5173 -- We carry a complete line of trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, pond plants, pond supplies, fountains and statuary. We do landscaping designs and installation as well as maintenance.

Holub Garden & Greenhouses, Inc., 22085 580th Ave., Ames, 515-232-4769 -- 10% discount not valid with other discounts.

Iowa Outdoor Products, 3200 86th Street, Des Moines -- Everything 10% discount.

K & K Gardens, 108 E. Wilbur St., Hawkeye, 52147, 563-427-5373, www.kkgardens.com -- *Closed for the season*, all members receive a 10% discount.

Kidman Tree Farm, Mike and Renee Kidman, 3665 NW 98th Ave., Polk City, 50226, 515-984-6946, www.kidmanfarms.com -- We sell Aquascape Pond Systems & Garden Railroad - both LGB & USA Trains. We will offer 10% off any G scale railroad sets or supplies.

Lowes Garden Center, 120 Airport Road, Ames, 515-233-0404 -- Pond and landscaping products only at customer service and number one garden register.

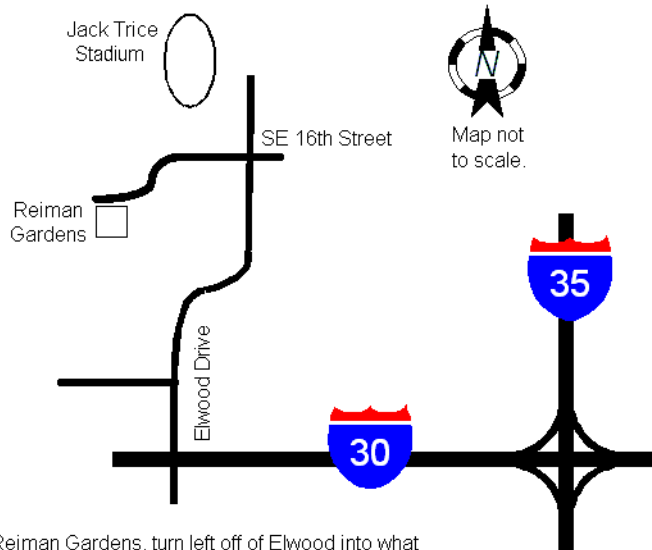
Quick's Hardware Hank, 502 East 1st Street, Huxley, 515-597-2338 -- 10% discount all garden things except items on sale/specials to members with card.

Skycrest Gardens, 243 Dave Circle, Ames, 515-233-1382, *Closed for the season* -- Almost everything 10% discount.

Struther's Trees and Outdoor Store, Jodi Ballard, 2908 NE 94th Ave., Ankeny (1 mile east of I-35 exit 92), 515-964-5145 -- 10% discount.

Willowglen Nursery, Lindsay Lee & E. Lee Zieke Lee, 3512 Lost Mile Road, Decorah, 52101 - - Card-carrying members have 10% discount on water plants.

Woodsmith Store Garden Center, 10320 Hickman Road, Des Moines, 50325, 515-254-9494 -- New garden center is open.



To get to Reiman Gardens, turn left off of Elwood into what appears to be the stadium parking lot (second stoplight north of Highway 30). Follow the drive all the way to the back to get to the parking area for Reiman Gardens.

Lisa Harmison
Central Iowa Water Garden Association
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