

**Ramblings** (Continued from Oct. 06) — *Jerry Kyle*

I was going to build a koi pond and had no clue how to proceed. In my research I found the Camellia Koi Club based in the greater Sacramento, CA, area which seemed my best bet for seeing what others had done. Most months the club held their meeting at a different home with a different pond. The variety was endless; Large, small, expensive, inexpensive, custom designed, owner designed, professionally built, and homebuilt. One had originally been a swimming pool. I recommend everyone find a local club if possible before planning and building a koi pond. If the club sponsors a pond tour, start there.

There were many decisions to make. Did I want a water garden that can support a few koi or did I want a pure koi pond? What was a "pure" koi pond? There are differences and one must know them or risk disappointment. Of course I wanted it all and I wanted it on a budget. It would be a do-it-yourself project but choices were simplified by the various Associated Koi Clubs of America publications made available to all club members. Club members and new friends came to my home to see what I planned and offered advice so I would not make too many mistakes.

One of the first to arrive was Ken who was one of the founders of the club back in 1968. Ken was a walking talking fountain of knowledge. He saw where I planned to dig a three foot deep three thousand gallon pond and told me if I dug it two feet deeper it would hold five thousand gallons and not take up any more space. Ken taught me the well known adage, "The solution to pollution is dilution." He explained the pond that the koi are swimming in is also their toilet. I had never thought of it that way. The more water there is in the pond the more the pollution can be diluted reducing its relative toxicity and its resulting stress on the koi while giving the bio-filter a little more time to do its job. When I asked if my planned filter was big enough or too big, he smiled and said there is no such thing as too much filter. With Ken's help I started to learn. He also recommended I attend the upcoming AKCA Annual Seminar and visit ponds looking for what did not seem to work as well as what seemed to work for them.

My pond was going to end up being a collection of what I perceived as being the features of each that I liked the most. There was much to learn as I visited many club members' koi ponds.

One of the earliest ponds I looked at belonged to Dennis and Ellen. With a home that takes up most of the lot there is not much room in the back yard just like at my house. Seeing this 5000 gallon pond convinced me this size feature would fit and could look good in my small back yard. My wife, Phyllis, particularly liked the idea that the pond was raised enough so Ellen could comfortably sit on the raised edge and hand feed the koi. Later, one of the first koi we got came from that pond. Phyllis named her Miss Piggy as she eats like a pig rushing to be first to be fed and sucks food out of her hand.

Improper water changes or the total lack thereof, is one of the most common mistakes that koi people make. One of the reasons may be that to dump a thousand gallons of water out of the pond and then refill with treated city water adds potentially dangerous chlorine to the pond and may require special treatment. When I visited Garry's pond I saw that he had a trickle of water continuously running through his pond and out the overflow. The key here is that it was a trickle and a trickle can greatly add up over a week's time and he added it through a spray head like one would use for a lawn. The spray could dissipate off much of the chlorine as chlorine is a gas. The air temperature on the day I visited this pond was over one hundred degrees. The evaporating spray which was administered from above cooled the air over the surface of the water effectively keeping the hot valley temperatures from overheating the pond on the hottest days. A few years later an article came out in KOI USA advocat-

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ing this as a positive alternative to sudden massive water changes. This was another feature I would have to incorporate into my plans.

I talked to Mary Beth about an idea of having a catch basin at the bottom of the waterfall to catch the falling water before it then spilled into the main pond. The catch basin would be raised and have its own bottom drain. While I was still thinking about it and planning it Mary built it. When I visited her pond I found she could turn off the water to the waterfall and open the drain in the catch basin. With a nozzle on a garden hose she could blast off any algae or other material on the falls and flush it down the drain. Then she just closed the drain, turned the falls on again, and water resumed flowing through the system. The beauty of this is she can clean off the falls in about five minutes and does not wash dirt into the pond thereby keeping the water clean and clear and not impacting the filters when cleaning the falls. This was definitely an item to add to my plans.

Some koi raisers are all about koi. They may have unbelievably beautiful koi while the pond may be pure functionality with the total focus on water quality for koi quality. Another of the earlier ponds I enjoyed seeing belonged to Pauline. When she built her fiberglass pond with best information available for water quality for koi quality, she chose not to sacrifice looks to have a quality functioning water system. Seeing what this master gardener did convinced me the pond does not have to end at its edge. The visual concept can continue onto dry land and once again seeing what a club member did made me want some of that. Another idea was added to my growing wish list.

My best ideas were more and more not my ideas at all but bits and pieces of what other club members had done. When I saw Ken's pond for the first time I just loved the cooling shade and the lush ferns. Needless to say my pond area has cooling shade and lush ferns. I saw it as another idea worth copying. When I saw Dan and Cheryl's yard with the patio off the family room and the raised pond to the side of that with the waterfall on the far end I knew that would work for me. When I saw that Jack and Barbara had a pond that was part of the whole instead of the yard being all about the pond I wanted that too. When I saw a fallen leaf on Wayne's pond race across the surface to get in the skimmer quickly I knew I wanted that. I had seen too many lazy skimmers so I talked to Doug, when I was at his pond, about water flow and installed with his advice a 4" drain on the skimmer as well as on the centered bottom drain so I have as little or as much of my water flow go out either exit. I don't know of another pond that can run nearly 4000 gallons an hour through the skimmer if needed. This is very valuable when the neighbor's fruit trees are losing their blossoms in the spring breeze. The list kept growing.

When the pond was finally up and running this summer the water was green. It stayed green. One of the considerations of bead filters is a tendency toward green water if the pond is not sufficiently shaded. A common solution is to add a UV light. I looked at green water as a symptom and did not want an expensive quick fix so called on Jason at his pond. After seeing what he did I built a homemade trickle style filter out of egg crates stacked behind my waterfall. The waterfall itself is more of a grotto with a spray bar inside the cave like structure. With half the water returned to the pond through eductors pointing up for a fluming action, an idea I got from Steve, and half returning via spray bars into a trickle filter I have maximum oxygenation without the expense of bubbles from an air pump and the water is not green any longer.

Everywhere I turn I see my pond is not my pond at all but a compilation of ideas gathered from oth-

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ers that I would never have met had it not been for the Camellia Koi Club. I still remember Carolyn advising me to listen to all ideas as different things work for different people based on various circumstances. I saw Bob and Jeanenne's pond with a little filter that logic said should not do the job. But, it does the job beautifully in an exquisite front courtyard. They balance the fish load to the filter which is so well hidden it does not detract from the beauty of the garden. Bob and Jeanenne installed steps and Phyllis made me add that to the list in case I ever fell in the pond. When I visited the other Carolyn's pond to see her prize winning koi I also saw her artistic side in the garden art and knew I wanted some of that too. When I saw how John and Jolene had so smoothly integrated their living room, patio, and pond seamlessly together that went on the list. Dennis and Marilee could monitor their koi on the TV. That had to be added to the list. Duane and Melody have a separate upper pond for veggie filter advantages so I enlarged the waterfall catch basin so I could have removable plants in the system but out of the koi pond.

One day Garry told me there is no such thing as the perfect pond and to quit planning it to death and finish building it. So I did. If he is right it may never be perfect as I wanted but I can keep tweaking it as I learn. In a way it does not feel like it is even my pond. Perhaps it is not and belongs to everyone in the Camellia Koi Club and is only my interpretation of their best ideas. As an idea pond it may continue to evolve but for now it is finished and is in the landscaping phase. It took four years during which time I added to my knowledge by becoming a Certified Koi Health Advisor, visiting ponds in other cities and other states through the Camellia Koi Club's affiliation with the AKCA, and attending annual AKCA Seminars.

I firmly believe there is no more effective way to learn about this hobby than to join a koi club and become involved with others who enjoy the beauty of koi. You too may find that we join for the koi and for the knowledge but stay for the exceptional people and the friendships made with others who are a little koi kichi.