

KHA Corner — Jerry Kyle, Koi Health Advisor (“KHA”)

This Month In The Koi Pond Or, “Is It Spring Yet?”

It's getting warmer. Not much, but warmer is warmer. My koi are again getting excited when they see me. I'm the food guy who can read lips when they mouth, “Feed me, feed me, feed me! This brings up an interesting topic. Last month I attended the “Toshio Sakai In Seminar” event in Pleasanton, CA, organized by Russell and Kari Peters of Peters & Sons Koi as part of their continuing support of the hobby

and local area koi clubs. Mr. Toshio Sakai, a highly regarded koi judge, is best known for the development of his Matsunosuke blood line of koi. These koi normally grow to be a meter and more in size. A meter is 39 inches and these koi often grow bigger than that. It was difficult for me to visualize a koi of 44 inches in length but in his presentation we saw a slide show of huge koi being lifted out of the mud ponds by the smaller in stature Japanese men as they struggled to lift them.



Toshio Sakai knows about feeding koi and he got my attention when he talked about the health aspects of seasonal feeding. He said in Japan feeding in May and June goes to reproduction. Summer food goes to growth. Fall food goes to fat. He does not support pond heating in winter as it confuses nature's cycle. In nature as the water warms up in the summer it triggers growth and he feeds heavily for three months to take advantage of the massive growth that can take place with nutrition going mostly to growth. He then feeds a very high protein diet consisting of 1/3 silkworm. In the fall he backs off as growth slows and nutrition goes primarily to fat as the koi get ready for winter and, just as in humans, overly fat is not healthy. Winter feeding is minimal as koi enter their “hibernation” (torpor) period and need minimal food as they expend minimal energy.

We are soon to enter spring and our koi are going to want more food. If we feed heavily, Mr. Sakai says we will not get more growth. We will get more eggs which is a good thing for the koi we select to spawn but of no value to the ones we do not spawn. Spawning is stressful and may easily cause damage to a nice koi. I also remember the mess made by six large females last year who were huge with eggs as they all spawned at once. Mr. Sakai suggests I do feed more to support a higher energy need and to support the immune system in the spring but not so much to create fat egg filled bellies. Once they get the (hopefully lighter) spawning out of the way and nutrition goes to growth I will feed them at least 10% of their body weight every day.

I know koi are by nature foragers and grazers. They are best served if they are fed continually a little at a time all day. In the summer, especially if feeding for growth, an automatic feeder that dribbles out a little every hour of the day is better than overloading the gut two or three times a day. Overfeeding and overfilling the gut at any one time is another problem and will be dealt with in a later article. Stay tuned.