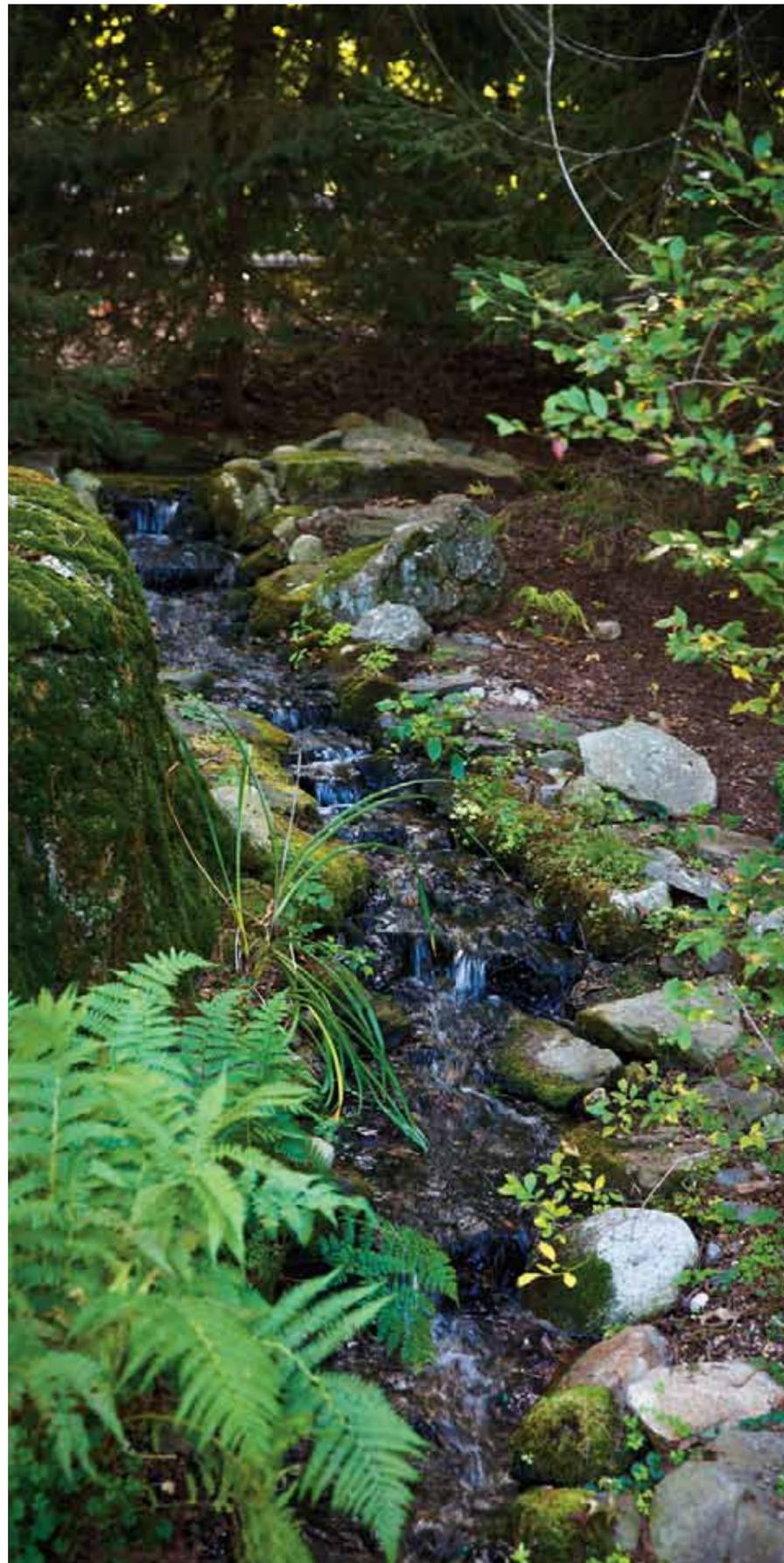




A Splash of Contentment

RELAX TO THE QUIET MUSIC OF A GARDEN STREAM.

By Linda Askey Photography by Porter Gifford



A garden pond is a gurgling testament to how a gardener and nature can work together with grand results. It is the synergy of the two that makes a successful pond. Of course, the opposite can also be true, as was the case when Alison Storry and Gary Koepke first installed a pond on their 2-acre property in Carlisle, Massachusetts.

Alison and Gary purchased the home from another couple—artists who had built a sculpture garden as the view from their ceramics studio. Alison and Gary are artists as well, and they built their pond on the site of the mostly deteriorated sculpture garden. But the water garden languished, and within a few years, they realized it was not the pristine view they had hoped for. That's when they hired designer Jay Bearfield of Liquid Landscape Designs.

"The pond needed a lot of love," Jay recalls. "It wasn't built well. There were dead fish. So we were brought in to give it a facelift and change the filtration to a natural filtration. The site had a woodland, some elevation, and this really cool mossed boulder." Because the ground was shaded and acidic beneath pines and oaks, the conditions were perfect for growing moss. All they had to do was set the stage and the drama of nature would begin.

To create a pond that is largely self-sustaining, requiring minimal inputs, the designer must understand the workings of nature, perhaps more than with any other type of garden. The ideal is to design a living ecosystem, which can be an intimidating goal. However, nature is the best ally. A water garden that appears and functions as if nature created it is a work of art—one that is deeply satisfying in both visual and subliminal ways.

"I've always been drawn to streams and brooks and ponds," Jay says. "I've spent a lot of hours watching the movement of water, the way water and stone interact." When he met Alison and Gary in 2007, he had been designing water features and ponds since 2000. With each job, he learned a little more, so by the time he stepped into their back yard, he could see that the existing pond was not well built. Flaws in the design, both aesthetic and functional, meant that the pond was less than it could be.

Cozy with Science

Jay speaks familiarly of the nitrogen cycle, as if he were talking about a favorite tool. He not only knows how it works; he puts it to use in the ponds he builds. Basically, nitrogen cycles among air, soil, and water. With the help of an army of beneficial bacteria, nitrogen is released from decaying plant and animal waste, feeding living plants that subsequently feed animals. Occasionally there is an influx of nitrogen when rain washes the nutrient into the pond from surrounding soil or when food is added for

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Alison Storry and Gary Koepke enjoy one of the benefits of a chemical-free pond: dangling their feet in the cool water. • The gentle slope of the wooded site makes the streams appear to be natural. • Stones at the pond's edge conceal one of two skimmers. • Stepping-stones offer firm footing in the bog garden.



Pink turtlehead



Pickerelweed



Pitcher plant



Golden club



Forget-me-not

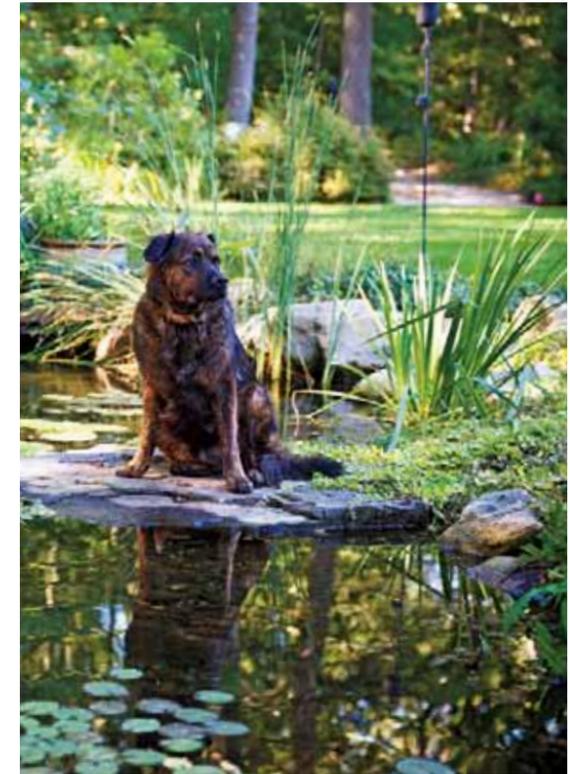
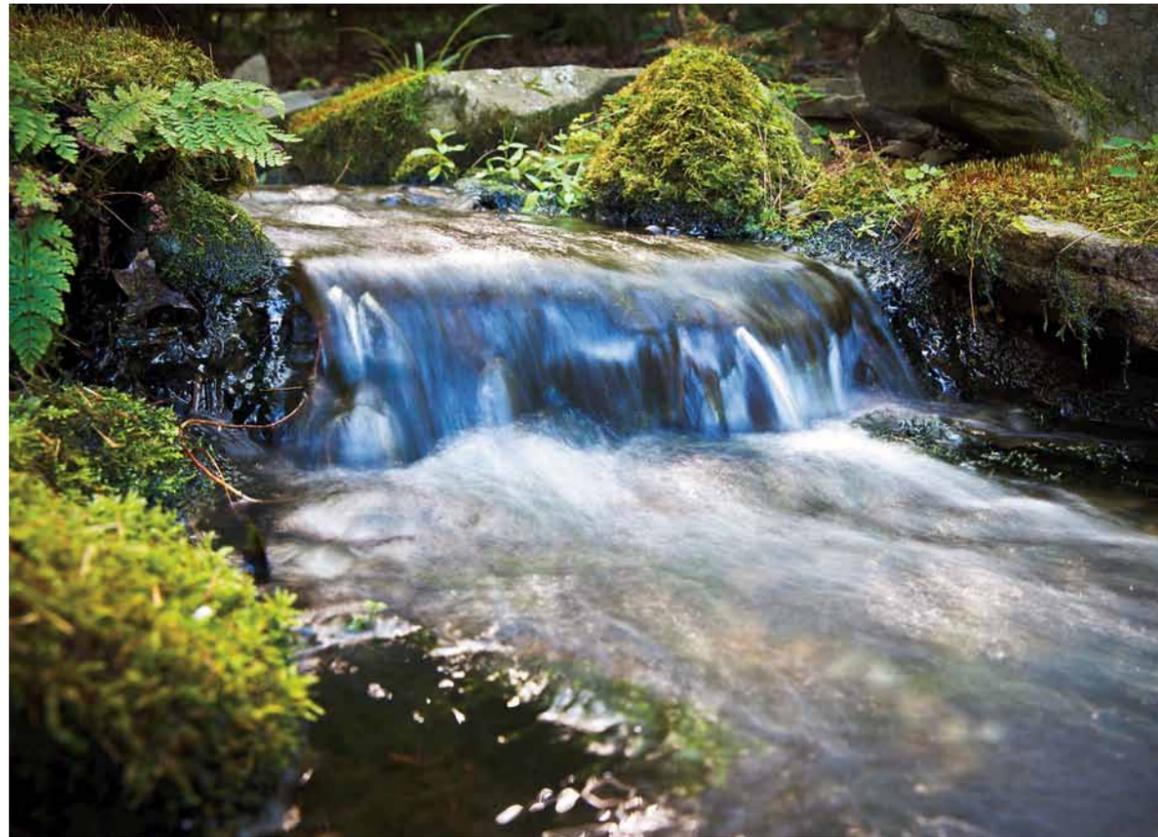
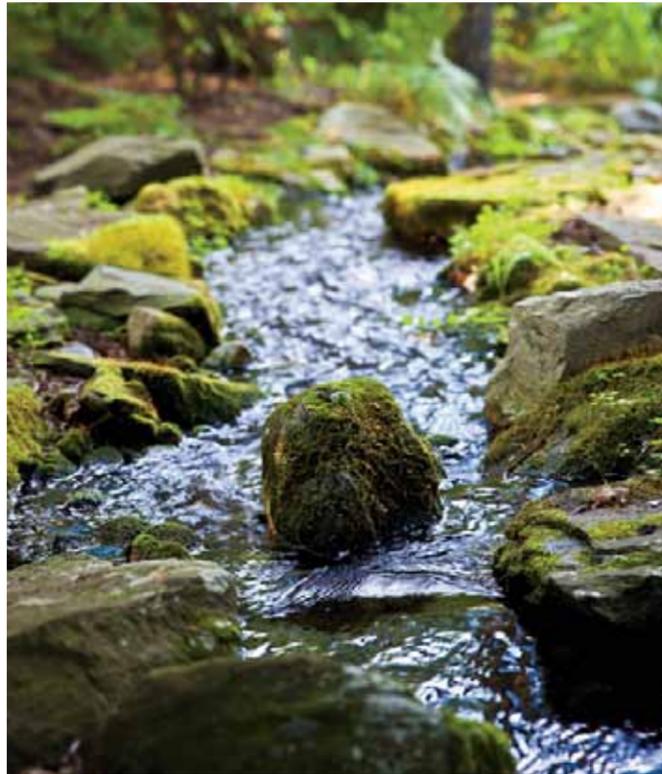


Canna

Planting on the Edge

A natural pond always has plants growing in the soggy soil where the water meets dry ground. In a water garden, as in a traditional garden, contrasting leaf textures and plant forms make a puddle of water look like a painting. Here are some good choices for the water's edge. —L.A.

- Variegated sweet flag (*Acorus calamus* 'Variegatus')
- Canna (*Canna* spp.)
- Golden sedge (*Carex elata* 'Bowles Golden')
- Pink turtlehead (*Chelone obliqua*)
- Elephant ears (*Colocasia* spp.)
- Log fern (*Dryopteris celsa*)
- Hardy hibiscus (*Hibiscus moscheutos*)
- Japanese iris (*Iris ensata*)
- Louisiana iris (*Iris Louisiana* hybrids)
- Leopard plant (*Ligularia* 'Britt Marie Crawford')
- Forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*)
- Golden club (*Orontium aquaticum*)
- Cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*)
- Pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*)
- Pitcher plant (*Sarracenia* spp.)
- Meadow spikemoss (*Selaginella apoda*)



Left to right: As a designer of streams and ponds, Jay Bearfield tries to avoid flat courses of water, preferring to insert stones into the bottom and sides of a stream.

- Water ripples and reflects light as it flows around mossy stones. The sound is a soft babble, not a thunderous roar.
- Flat rocks are a favorite pondside perch for Gusto, Alison and Gary's rescue dog.



"Once you introduce water, it changes your life."

—JAY BEARFIELD

the fish. Keeping a balance of nitrogen means that water plants flourish and fish are well fed, even without fish food. Too much nitrogen can cause algae to grow, which is detrimental. The pond needs some nitrogen, but not too much. For Jay, it's all about balance.

Rather than using pond chemicals, he gives his water gardens the growing conditions they need and backs away. "I promise every client," he says proudly, "that their pond will need no more than 45 minutes of maintenance per month." He guarantees his work, but only if the client gardens organically on the surrounding lawn and garden. Suddenly those who never considered themselves organic gardeners become conscientious stewards. "The pond is like their baby," Jay says. "They understand, and the pond becomes a little classroom."

Works Well, Looks Good

Whether in nature or in a back yard, any trickle of water is a magnet for wildlife, people, and pets. Gusto, Alison and Gary's dog rescued from Haiti's earthquake disaster, likes to sit on a big flat rock that juts into the pond. It's his regular bath, but they do not worry about his nails puncturing the liner. Their pond liner is protected with a layer of soil and stones that provides an anchor for aquatic plants. Jay does not plant in traditional submerged pots; his plants grow directly in the bottom of the pond.

"The more roots are exposed to water," he explains, "the more they grab nutrients and cut down on algae. [The plants] aren't potbound, they don't tip over, and you don't see any pots." In addition, the healthy plants

shade the water to minimize the growth of algae. Fish can hide under the leafy screen, protecting them from predators such as herons.

The filtration system hides, too, disguised as a bog garden. An energy-efficient pump sends water from two hidden skimmers in the pond up the hillside to a filtration bog, which is built over stones in graduated sizes, the largest at the bottom. The surfaces of those stones host the bacteria that do the work of filtering the water. A second bog garden adjacent to the pond serves as an overflow for the pond after heavy rains. Both bogs have the added benefit of being havens for birds, which enjoy the shallow, inch-deep water.

From the filtration bog, a stream cascades down the slope to the pond, splitting in two along the way. Because Jay wants the streams he builds to appear natural, he is particular about stones and their placement. Water seldom pours over flat stones or down steps in nature; instead, it laps and flows past rounded stones. In addition, Jay avoids placing an artificial-looking ring of stones around his ponds. Soil and margin-dwelling plants and moss go right down to the edge of the water. With an eye toward naturalistic placement of the surrounding plants and stones, a water garden looks "like a part of the land, instead of like we built it," Jay says.

The pond has renewed Alison and Gary's appreciation of nature. Not only does it fulfill their desire for a picturesque backyard view; it offers a tranquil soundtrack—one the couple enjoys hearing at night through their open windows. When they share their garden for a local tour, Gary observes, "People sit on that bench for hours. It reminds me of how lucky I am." 🐾

Advice for the Do-It-Yourselfer

Before you take the plunge, consider these tips from pond designer Jay Bearfield.

START SMALL. To make a deck-top water garden that requires no digging, plug the drainage hole of a large ceramic pot with plumber's putty from the hardware store. Fill the pot with water and a few aquatic plants. In fall, puncture the putty to drain the pot.

CONSIDER YOUR ABILITIES. Larger water gardens can involve plumbing and electricity, filters and pumps. You may need to hire professionals to assist with a complex project.

HAVE FUN. Enjoy the process as well as the outcome. Water gardening is work, but don't let the bad outweigh the good. —L.A.

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