

# *The Lily Pad*

*The Topeka Area Water Garden Society*

Published Monthly – February to November

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## **Perennials for the shaded water garden**

*by Pat Rokey*

As we look out the window at the gray landscapes and the lightly falling snow, it's difficult to imagine what we saw during this last year isn't it? Every year, I'm always amazed at the quickly-changing scenario outside our windows from about March on. But, in January, we think it will never get here.

So I'm trying to conjure up all of the perennials we saw in bloom in our gardens last year, and it is slowly coming to me as I check our lists of plants that we have found to be the toughest, longest-blooming, and prettiest. Following is a list of plants that we have found to be fairly low-maintenance plants, but might be some you haven't tried just yet. Knowing your zone helps, of course, but I've found that you cannot totally depend on what is written in books, probably because they were written in the perfect Northwest and the Northeast that gets 10 more inches of rain than we do. So, we have to do a little more experimenting here to find out just what we can plant that will survive.

That said, I hope you don't limit yourselves to what anyone says in their books that we cannot grow in the middle Midwest. I've read that we can't grow Azaleas here. We have two 25-yr. old Exbury Hybrids that are 11'-12' tall and bloom every year! Also, the Girard Hybrids and Northern Lights Series do very well here. But, this article is about shade perennials, so here we go.

If any of you have a water garden in the shade, you are very lucky. Ours is in the sun and we can't grow some of our favorite plants, but the sun is very beneficial to the growth of algae inside the pond! Besides grasses, nothing looks better around ponds than ferns, hostas, and Japanese Maples. The ferns Dick and I like the best are Autumn, Robust Male and Japanese Painted Ferns. The first two are very low-maintenance and the latter needs just a little supplemental watering during droughts. The Autumn Fern (*Dryopteris erythrosora* and *erythrosora*) 'Brilliance Autumn' are evergreen, but by the end of the winter you will need to cut back the old tattered leaves to make room for the beautiful new coppery-colored fronds that change to green as the season warms up. 'Brilliance Autumn' is even a brighter copper, with a little rose flush thrown in, in the spring and again in the fall. Spectacular! If you want a larger fern, Robust Male Fern (*Dryopteris felix-mas* 'Undulata Robusta'), which

## **Monthly Meeting**

**7:00 p.m., Wed., Feb. 18, 2004**  
**Landscaping around your pond**

By Vivien Smith - Puddles-N-Pads

is only evergreen until about Christmas, is a real focal point at 2'-4' tall. I also have to add the one that everyone knows, Japanese Painted Fern (*Athyrium n.* 'Pictum'), because there are new ones available including 'Burgundy Lace', which has silvery-colored new fronds suffused with rose and burgundy. This one is especially delightful. Also, there is 'Ursula's Red' and 'Ghost' and...

If you haven't tried Pulmanarias yet, please make this the year that you do. They bloom for 6 weeks in midspring with blue flowers changing to pink or vice versa. And their leaves are spotted gray or silver and are evergreen. Some of our favorites are 'Bertram Anderson', 'Mrs. Moon', 'Roy Davidson', 'Victorian Brooch', with magenta-coral flowers, and then there are ones with leaves of mostly silver-white such as 'Spilled Milk' and 'Excalibur', which really glow in the shade.

Have you tried the phloxes for shade, *Phlox divaricata* and *stolonifera*? *Divaricata* is native here and comes in blue or purple flowers and slowly spreads over the years with blooms from mid spring on, at 8"-15" tall. *Stolonifera* is shorter at 6" and is a good drought-tolerant groundcover for shade that can take some sun. It also blooms for a long time. Please note, these are not the same phloxes that you see blooming everywhere in the sun, cascading over rocks, etc.

Forget-me-nots, which are in the same family as the ones you put in your pond, are biennials, and they come in pink, blue and white. Of course, as biennials they only bloom one year, but they do seed around and keep coming back every year.

Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum*) are wonderful under the dry shade of trees and the cultivar, 'Variegatum', is especially nice. True Geraniums (not *Pelargoniums*) are wonderful little plants with small flowers that bloom over a long period. Some will do well in the sun such as 'Ballerina', but most need that afternoon shade. 'Biokovo', 'Max Frei', and 'Alan Bloom' have grown very well for us over the years. There are many more out there so don't be afraid to try others. They need a moist, but well-drained soil. This is a rule that

should be used for most plants, "moist, but well-drained", whether they're in the sun or shade.

Other good shade perennials are Jack-in-the-pulpit (*Arisaema*), gingers (*Asarum*), carex, epimediums and violets, especially *Viola labradorica* (Labradore Violet). The latter will seed around quite delightfully, but will not be invasive like our native violet. It has purplish leaves and cute lavender flowers.

And we don't want to forget about coral bells (*Heuchera*), with silvery-green, purple or even golden leaves. Also, the campanulas, hardy cyclamens, *Corydalis lutea* and *cheilanthesifolia* (with yellow flowers all summer), and *Astilbes*, which do need more watering during droughts. And my favorite, one you must try if you haven't, are Hellebores! These magnificent plants are now considered the #1 shade plant in many parts of the country. They have shiny, large evergreen leaves and flowers (bracts) that bloom on and on through the spring, perhaps 3 to 4 months. They bloom in pink, purple, yellow, greenish, red and white and the best are the orientalis hybrids and niger for our area.

Our gardens are always open and we invite you to visit any time from April through September. You will see the above and several other different gardens. We also invite you to come out to Lake Shawnee and view the new gardens just east of the gazebo at 37th and Westedge Rd. I am one of the chairpersons of a committee at a Master Gardener shade and rock garden along a dry creek bed with a bridge that will have a path leading up to the Garden House and where a lot of weddings have taken place. TBA and the county have also created a lot of different water gardens and annual and perennial gardens there and we believe this area will someday be on national lists of arboretums in America.

## Plans underway for Lawn & Garden Show booth

Becky Coffman and her committee are hard at work on the booth for the TAWGS booth at the 2004 Topeka Lawn Garden Show February 20 – 22. It sounds like they have another neat project underway. If you can lend a hand to help set up or work a 4 hour shift please call Dean Demoss at 272-1525 or e-mail him at [drdemoss2000@yahoo.com](mailto:drdemoss2000@yahoo.com). It's lots of fun and is a good way to get better acquainted with fellow TAWGS members.

## Winter Planning

*Reprinted from Jan/Feb 2004 Water Garden News*

Now is a good time to be thinking about ways to improve the enjoyment of our ponds. It may be cold and wet in your area and it may not be a good time to sit around your pond but it is a good time to consider ways to improve on it for the coming season.

If you don't have moving water already it is easy to add a pump and fountain or waterfall to add the sound of moving water to your garden. You only need a

place to plug the pump into an electrical outlet. The sound of water adds immensely to the enjoyment of a water garden.

Or maybe you already have a waterfall that you would like to have improved. Now is the time to make those plans. A waterfall can be altered by changing the pump to a lighter or heavier flow, changing the rock work, or by adding a stream.

You may want to consider ways that you can decrease the amount of maintenance that you have with your water feature. If you find that you are getting debris into your pond in rainy weather you will want to build a dam or swale to divert the water around your pond instead of allowing the runoff to flow into it. If your present filter system does not include a pre-filter then you may be able to decrease the amount of time spent cleaning pump screens by adding a mechanical pre-filter to your system. If you are using a submersible pump to pump water into an external filter you are probably cleaning the pump intake almost daily. If you add a pre-filter such as the Signal Pond Products 750 filter or the Pondmaster PM1000 then you may be able to go a few weeks between cleanings. It is much easier to remove debris from the water before it is pumped. Pumping dirty water and then trying to remove the debris is much harder because the pump acts as a blender making a lot of the debris much smaller and harder to remove.

The ultimate pre-filter is a skimmer. You can retrofit your pond with a full size skimmer, such as the Savio Skimmerfilter or Atlantic Skimmer, but it may take a half-days work or more. It should be worth your time and expense as this will greatly reduce the amount of time spent maintaining the pond. There are also skimmers that can be more easily retrofitted to the pond such as the Pondmaster Skimmer/Filter or the skimmers by Cal Pump.

Have you been struggling with green water in the past and are ready for the easy solution? If so, now is a good time to plan for adding an ultraviolet sterilizer to the pond.

Winter is also a great time for planning a new water garden. If you have been in the hobby for any length of time you have probably filled up your pond with all the plants and fish that it will hold. So, why not build another pond and make it larger this time to allow you to add a new fish or plant occasionally? You can use the information that you learned from your first pond to improve on the new one. As long as the ground is not frozen you can construct the pond throughout the winter months without the rush to finish before the growing season. The process of building the pond is a lot easier when you can take your time. You will have plenty of time to finish and the pond will be ready for fish and plants as soon as spring arrives.

Care should be taken if you are digging your pond and don't get the liner installed before a rain. You should use cheap builders plastic (available at your local builders supply store) to cover the excavation to keep the rainwater from damaging your work.

*Gardening Rule: When weeding, the best way to make sure you are removing a weed and not a valuable plant is to pull on it. If it comes out of the ground easily, it is a valuable plant.*

# A pond in winter

by Mary Alice Kropp

Reprinted from Jan/Feb Water Garden News

It's November in New Hampshire. The sky is gray, the weather is raw and winter is most definitely in the air. There is a bit of snow on the ground, and the promise of more to come before spring returns. Everything, including the pond in the backyard, is closed and silent, awaiting the return of warmth and green.

And yet, there is a beauty in the winter pond. Not the lush, vibrant green beauty of the warmer weather, but a stark, clean beauty that is not apparent under spring and summer's cover of growth. Most of the plants are out of the pond, tender tropicals that require the relative warmth and light of the basement to survive the cold. But a few remain, stalwart, hardy individuals that brush off the cold with dormant nonchalance, awaiting the signals of sun and warmer temperatures to send up new growth. For now, they sleep in the deepest water, dark, barely seen reminders of the wonders of the seasonal cycles of life.

Around the pond, too, the plants have changed with the season. Perennials, like the garden mum, raise clean, skeletal stalks out of the snow cover. The vinca that creeps along the waterfall is a splash of bright green and cream, incongruous against the bare branches and clean outlines of the rest of the garden. Thyme, another evergreen, is a deep green mound, another plant whose special beauty stands out in winter.

Even the water changes at this time of year. It appears dark, probably because the sky is gray and dark above it so often. The inky depth even looks cold. Standing at the edge of the pond, looking into the almost impenetrable darkness, broken now and again by a flash of orange and white as a fish darts among the cover of bottom plants, one seems to be peering into a well of Winter.

Frosty days mean the heater must go into the water, to keep it from freezing over and killing the fish. But even this ever so mundane a device helps add to the beauty of the winter pond. The warmth from the heater causes fog to rise off the pond, reflecting the half-light of early morning and the lights surrounding the pond edge at night. Like fairy mist from some magical water garden, ghost tendrils of mist rise from the surface of the water, dancing slowly upward to disappear into the cold air. It is almost as if the pond breathes, each breath a frosty reminder that life remains.

Winter is a time of special beauty in a pond, but only if you look closely. It is too easy to think only of dead plants, bare water and fish that have dropped out of sight into the depths of the colder water. But there is beauty there, waiting to be seen and appreciated until spring comes again to renew our havens of water.

There is still time to register for the Spring Water Garden Seminar at St. Joe, March 26-27. Deadline is February 14. Call 816-233-9247 for more details.

# Bubble Butt the Second

By Diane Gruver

Winter at the Gruver's hasn't been nearly as exciting this year because we don't have any frogs in the house. We do, however, have about twenty fish in various tubs and containers in the dining room.

The aquarium is fired up again this year too and has Bubble Butt II (a black moor) and two Heinz 57 goldfish that hatched in our outdoor containers last summer (one white and one brown). I'm not sure what is going on with BB II, but he seems to be acting a little like his predecessor, Bubble Butt The First. (For those who are newcomers, BB I lived with swim bladder for a couple years and even though we babied him in every way, he finally went to fish heaven last winter.)

I noticed a few weeks ago that BB II would just pop to the top and take a nap, so to speak. A slight poke would send him swimming again so I deduced that he needed a warmer environment. I gave him a heater. That worked for a little while but again he would pop to the top, most noticeably in the evening after being fed. Now, Bubble Butt is NOT a quiet eater – you can hear him slurping at the surface to take in whatever he can find. SO, I deduced that he was taking on air, which gave him a tummy ache, causing him to float. SO, now I'm feeding him food that sinks. I guess only time will tell if that cures his problem.

I've about decided that although black moors are cute as all get out, they are definitely NOT worth all the trouble. When BB II leaves this life, I'm going to stick to goldfish, Heinz 5 and shubunkins. They may not be as exotic, but they are sure more hardy.

The weather has been a roller coaster this winter, and although it's wintry right now, I have sure enjoyed the warm days that we've had. Our pond has been free of ice most of the winter and the fish have ventured to the top to feed off the algae on the sides. Even in winter we have yucky green stuff growing on the waterfall.

Sunday I counted seven squirrels at the feeders, several gold finches, a dozen or so doves, various sizes of woodpeckers and a few blue birds. This is the first time we've had bluebirds in our yard so it's been rather exciting.

On a more serious note, I would like to report on some former TAWGS members who are having serious health problems. You might remember Joe and Judy Cunningham from Valley Falls who have been on a few of our public and member pond tours.

I learned recently that Joe was seriously ill with a blood clot on his lung this past summer and although he is better, still has to use oxygen at night. Judy recently underwent surgery for removal of a large tumor in her shoulder and is currently undergoing radiation 5 days a week for seven weeks. If you would like to remember them with a card their address is 6585 142<sup>nd</sup> ST, Valley Falls, KS 66088.

Another TAWGS member and friend, Max Loyd from Hiawatha, is undergoing tests and treatment at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Hospital in Houston. You might remember that Max has attended some member tours with Floyd and I. His address is: 946 US 36 Hwy, Hiawatha, KS 66434, e-mail [maxandgeorgie@yahoo.com](mailto:maxandgeorgie@yahoo.com). I'm sure he would love to hear from you.

See you at the meeting February 18<sup>th</sup>!

Topeka Area Water Garden Society  
 9900 SW K-4 Highway  
 Topeka, KS 66614

## Calendar of Events

Feb. 1 – 5	Flower Lawn & Garden Show, American Royal, KC
Feb. 18	TAWGS Monthly Meeting
<b>Feb. 20-22</b>	<b>Topeka Lawn &amp; Garden Show*</b>
February 27-29	Johnson Co. Lawn & Garden Show
March 3 – 7	Wichita Lawn and Garden Show
March 17	TAWGS Monthly Meeting
March 18 – 21	Kansas City Home Show, Bartle Hall
March 26-27	St. Joe Water Garden Seminar
Apr. 10 – 21	Binkley Tulip Days
Apr. 21	TAWGS Monthly Meeting
May 19	TAWGS Monthly Meeting
June 16	TAWGS Monthly Meeting
June 26-27	13 <sup>th</sup> Annual Topeka Pond Tour
July 10 – 11	Kansas City Pond Tour
July 21	TAWGS Monthly Meeting
Aug. 18	TAWGS Monthly Meeting

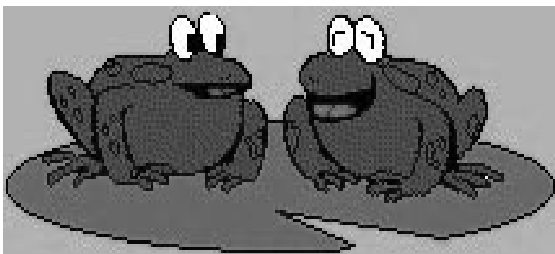


Happy Valentine's Day

**Your Dues are Due if your label reads  
 9-03, 10-03, 11-03 or 2-04**  
 Please renew as soon as possible to continue  
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### THE TOPEKA AREA WATER GARDEN SOCIETY OFFICERS:

Tom Platis	President
Topeka	785-478-9514
Becky Coffman	Vice President
Topeka	785-272-6568
Diane Gruver	Secretary
Holton	785-364-3046
Jim Green	Treasurer
Topeka	785-272-7139



Check it out - [www.tawgs.org](http://www.tawgs.org)

## *The Lily Pad*

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The Lily Pad encourages submission of articles pertaining to water gardening from the membership and other interested parties. Deadline is the last weekend of each month. Address input and/or questions to:

Diane Gruver, The Lily Pad Editor  
 408 Emerald, Holton, KS 66436  
 785 364-3046 (w) 785-233-4085  
[fdgruver@holtonks.net](mailto:fdgruver@holtonks.net)

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