



LET'S GROW Native

Column and photograph
by Carol A. Heiser

A water feature in the home landscape can be a tranquil oasis of natural beauty. Small water gardens are a wonderful way to accent your existing habitat with native vegetation that will provide food or protective cover to frogs, salamanders, dragonflies, and other wildlife species that depend on water for survival. Water features are even more beneficial if they're not stocked with goldfish, koi or other fish, because fish prey on frog eggs and tadpoles, and fish compete with wildlife for aquatic food sources like insect larvae.

There are a variety of native plants you can place in or around an aquatic feature. At the water's edge, where the soil stays consistently moist (and assuming the water garden will get several hours of sunlight), you could use Virginia blue flag (*Iris virginica*), white turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*), cardinal flower (*Lobelia*

cardinalis), orange jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*), sensitive fern (*Onoclea sensibilis*), square-stemmed monkey flower (*Mimulus ringens*), fox sedge (*Carex vulpinoidea*), and mistflower (*Conoclinium coelestinum*).

Some water features are designed like a big bathtub with shelves at different levels, where you can weigh down potted plants to keep their roots under water and their leaves above water. Soft rush (*Juncus effusus*), pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*), and duck potato, also known as broad-leaved arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*), are good choices here.

Other plants require complete submersion, where their roots can grow in the soil (or pots) at the very bottom of the water feature, and their stems grow up through the water so that leaves and flowers float on the surface. These include fragrant white water lily (*Nymphaea odorata*) and yellow pond lily (*Nuphar advena*).

Unfortunately, many garden centers and aquatic suppliers continue to sell invasive aquatic plant species. These vendors are apparently unaware of or unconcerned about the environmental consequence that invasive species can have in displacing native plant communities. Before you purchase any aquatic plants, familiarize yourself with the names of common non-natives that are known to be invasive, such as the following:

MAKE SURE TO WATCH



"How to Add a Frog Pond to Your Landscape" on the VDGIF YouTube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mhRiUqjhx4>

yellow floating heart (*Nymphoides peltata*), which looks like a yellow water lily; parrot-feather (*Myriophyllum aquaticum*); water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*); water lettuce (*Pistia stratiotes*); and yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*).

Likewise, be sure to avoid moving plants from one body of water to another, whether the plants are found in your local neighborhood or another region of the state, because introductions increase the likelihood of spreading non-native species as well as potential pathogens from one ecosystem to another. Those beautiful pinkish-purple flowers you see growing all around someone else's pond might very well be purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), a highly aggressive invasive that's listed as a Tier 2 Noxious Weed by the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

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RESOURCES

- ◆ *Purchasing Aquatic Plants Fact Sheet*, Virginia Cooperative Extension, 2015 at https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/426/426-044/426-044-pdf.pdf
- ◆ *10 Native Wetland Plants*, U.S. Botanic Garden (scroll down for PDF) at <https://www.usbg.gov/national-garden-native-plant-recommendations>
- ◆ *Adding a Frog Pond to Your Landscape* at <https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/virginia-is-for-frogs>

