THE HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE TO WATER GARDEN DESIGN & CONSTRUCTION
Whether it's a small, decorative water feature or a pond complete with fish, there are many options to enhance your Southern California backyard. The addition of a water feature is something that will bring a lot of enjoyment. After all, everyone is drawn to water. It's the whole experience—watching water gurgle, trickle, or cascade is mesmerizing. There's nothing quite like it.

If you're considering a water feature, here are some other benefits to consider.

- **Great Investment.** Water features will enhance your outdoor living space and therefore contribute to your return on investment.

- **Aesthetic Appeal.** A water feature makes your backyard one-of-a-kind, even if you live in a cookie cutter neighborhood where all the houses and yards are alike. A water feature can be custom-designed to your style and taste, making it truly your own.

- **The Serenity Factor.** There is nothing quite like the tranquil sound of running water or the hypnotic way it ripples across your water feature. It's a great way to unwind after a long day.

- **Long-Term Enjoyment.** You'll watch your koi fish grow from babyhood to adults, which is incredibly rewarding. For most people, their koi become like backyard pets. You'll also watch your water plants mature and change over the years.

- **A Family Affair.** A pond is something the whole family can enjoy together. Whether you have kids or grandkids, going out to feed the fish can be a family activity.

- **Education.** There is a wonderful opportunity to teach your children or grandchildren about nature when they can watch it in action. Children will learn about the lifecycle of fish and plants.
3 Main Options

1. Pondless Waterfalls

Pondless waterfalls are exactly what they sound like—a recirculating waterfall and/or stream without the presence of a pond. Pondless waterfalls aren’t right for everyone, particularly if you really want fish or a lot of plants. But they are a lower maintenance option that also works great in even small spaces. Here are some considerations with pondless waterfalls.

- **Low-Maintenance.** A pondless waterfall is a great option for homeowners who want to enjoy the sight and sound of running water without the maintenance that is involved with a pond.

- **Safety factor:** Because the reservoir that the waterfall empties into is underground, a pondless waterfall might be considered a safer option for families with young children or pets.

- **Relaxing Scenery:** A waterfall is typically one of the most desirable add-ons. And with a pondless waterfall you'll get relaxing scenery that can be enjoyed both day and night.

- **Lots of Options:** There are many different design options to customize your pondless waterfall. Just a few examples include:
  
  - Natural waterfalls
  - A stream bed
  - Cascading low-lying waterfalls
  - A bridge
2. Ponds

A pond with darting fish, floating and surrounding plants, and a cascading waterfall can really complete your backyard living space. When installed properly, a pond becomes a functional ecosystem right in your own backyard. Here are some considerations with backyard ponds.

- **Size**: Ponds come in a variety of sizes and shapes that can be customized based on factors such as budget, style and preference, and the size of your property.

- **Less Maintenance Than You Think**: Most homeowners think that a pond is a tremendous amount of work, but the truth is maintenance is minimal if the pond was built properly and you keep up with some basic routine checks.

- **Fish**: One of the main intentions of having a traditional pond is for the enjoyment that fish can bring to your backyard experience.

- **Fun Upgrades**: A pond is made complete when incorporated with recirculating waterfalls or streams for maximum enjoyment.
3. Miscellaneous Water Features

There are certainly options beyond a more traditional pondless waterfall or a pond. If you have a smaller property or just want to add a small water feature to a patio, you might consider a small decorative item like a bubbling urn or flowing fountain. These have a big impact in terms of interest and appeal. Here are some other considerations with miscellaneous water features.

- **Fountains:** The most common water feature, fountains come in a variety of styles. From fountain vases to urns, bowls, rocks, or other options, you can find something that works best for you.

- **Water Walls:** Though it’s still a relatively new concept, a water wall is quickly gaining popularity. A water wall consists of a large rock slab over which water falls down into a contained reservoir. The wall can be a single sheet of glass or rock, such as granite or slate, or it can be built of wood or resin.

- **Something for the Pets:** If you’re a pet owner and looking for something unique for your four-legged family member, you might even consider a pet fountain. With a circulating pump, pet fountains recycle water and shoot it out of a spout, into the air. It’s both decorative and functional in that it keeps your pet hydrated.
Design Considerations

In choosing amongst those three main options, you should consider factors such as the space available, budget, and level of interest. Let’s take a quick look at each of these considerations.

Space. If you have a small property or want to add a water feature to just a small area of it (such as on a patio), then you should most likely consider a decorative water feature like a fountain or a bubbling urn. If you have the room for a pondless waterfall or a pond, those can also vary in size. The most common pond size is about 10 by 15 foot but can certainly be larger or smaller. You must consider what works for your space.

Budget. Of course how much you’re willing to spend is also a huge piece of the puzzle in terms of what water feature is right for you. For a minimal investment ($4,000 to $6,000), you could have a small fountain or decorative water feature. But water features can vastly range in cost, all the way up to $20,000+ for a larger feature with all the bells and whistles.

Level of interest. Do you want a water feature that requires zero to no maintenance? If so, a decorative fountain or pondless waterfall will likely be your best bet. Or do you want to be involved in the care of your pond and would enjoy feeding fish and maintaining a water garden? If so, you should definitely opt for a pond.
Adding Pond Plants

Pond plants add an incredibly attractive element to your pond. But they also play a vital role in helping maintain the overall health and appearance of your pond.

That’s because pond plants assist in purifying the water by reducing nutrients, filtering out sediments, breaking down toxic compounds, and digesting unwanted substances. Because different plants have different abilities, planting a variety of species will ensure balanced filtration.

Plant types that are commonly used in ponds include:

- Submerged plants
- Floating plants (not rooted in the soil)
- Marginal plants (rooted in the soil but growing above the water’s surface)

Having a healthy mix of all three of these types of plants will not only contribute to the health of your pond, as previously mentioned, but will go a long way in ensuring that your pond looks natural.

While there are many aquatic plants to choose from, some of the more popular options for in and around a pond include:

- Water Lilies
- Water Hyacinth
- Water Lettuce
- Water Hawthorne
- Lotus
- Yellow Floating Heart
- Cattails
- Horsetail

If it’s a pondless waterfall that you’re planning, you most likely will have marginal plants incorporated around the edges of your water feature. A pond professional can help create a design that adds some color and enhances the overall look.
Adding Fish

Most ponds in Southern California include fish. The climate is right for them to survive year round. Fish are easy to maintain as long as you keep your pond healthy and you keep your fish fed. If fish are not desirable to you, consider a pondless option.

Here are some other considerations for adding fish.

- **Enjoyment:** The movement that fish add as they dart about add both interest and enjoyment to your pondscape.

- **Family Involvement:** As mentioned previously, a pond poses a great opportunity to teach kids about the fish life cycle. Kids love getting involved with feeding the fish.

- **Finding the Right Fish:** Whatever fish that you plan to add to your pond, just make sure that they are suited to outdoor life. There are three main types of fish that work best in ponds.
  - Koi fish (the most common)
  - Goldfish
  - Plecostomus
Additional Elements

One of the great things about ponds is that they can be as simple or as elaborate as you wish. The fun doesn’t end with fish and plants. You might also consider adding some of the following features to your pond.

- Waterfalls, Bridges and Seating Areas: Any of these additions would greatly enhance a pond’s beauty and functionality.

- Lighting. Adding lighting to your pond allows you to enjoy its beauty at night. Ponds have a whole new sense of appeal in the evening hours. There is even color changing technology that can add something truly unique.

- Smart Controls. These days technology is making our lives easier and it’s no different with your backyard pond. Smart controls allow you to remotely control all your pumps, feeders, or lighting options.
What to Expect During Water Garden Installation

If you’re thinking about installing a pond you might be wondering what goes into the process. When your design is complete and it comes time to install the project, here are some steps that you can expect to take place.

- Marking out the design
- Installing the equipment
- Installing the underlayment and the liner
- Work on the rock design and edging
- Plantings in and around the water feature
- Installation of lighting (with easy access so that you can easily change a bulb)
- A wash down so that it's free of debris
- Fill with water
- Adding fish

Of these steps, there are many areas where do-it-yourselfers or even contractors who don't have a lot of experience with ponds can go wrong. Securing the liner is one such area. It’s imperative that this is secured properly or else your pond will leak. It’s also critical that you have adequate filtration for the size of your pond. In just a bit, we will discuss how working with a professional can prevent some of these mistakes and more.
Water Garden Maintenance

A pond that is given regular upkeep is easy to maintain. But there may be times (every 1-2 years), when you require a pond cleanout service. A total cleanout will essentially give you a fresh start, restoring the water and the overall health of the pond. Here are the steps that you should expect during a pond cleanout service from a reputable professional.

- Empty the debris net or basket
- Clean the skimmer filter mat
- Thorough pump inspections
- Full pond draining
- Temporary habitat and transfer of Koi or fish (if applicable)
- Remove leaves and debris
- Trim or remove dead plants
- Pressure wash the entire pond
- Refill the pond
- Add beneficial bacteria and any other needed treatments
- Safely re-introduce your fish

Once your pond is cleaned out, just keeping up with the regular basic maintenance should keep it operating at its best. This includes tasks like trimming back overgrown aquatic plants, adding beneficial bacteria, doing regular checks on your pumps, and feeding your fish.
Working with a Professional

While ponds are sometimes tackled as do-it-yourself projects, or by contractors who don't have much experience in the category, there are many areas where costly mistakes can be made. A pond won't function properly if not installed correctly and that can mean sending dollars down the drain (no pun intended). When it comes to finding a pond professional you should look for a company that has pond-specific-experience (and a portfolio of pond designs to prove it).

By working with a professional you ensure that...

**It looks natural.** This is one of the biggest mistakes made with pond design--when it looks like it was just plunked in the middle of a yard with no thoughtful approach to a seamless blend with nature. Even the rock and boulder placement require an artistic touch so that they look as though they've always been there. **You do not want something that looks like a hole dug in the ground with a pearl necklace of rocks around it.**

**It's done properly.** From the design phase to the actual installation, it's so important that everything is done properly or it will cost you money and headaches in repairs down the road. If you have a pond that wasn't installed properly, you may be interested in a pond restoration service from a pond professional who can fix what went wrong.

**You have access to support.** With a pond professional, you’ll have access to someone that you can pose questions to or troubleshoot a potential problem. Whether it's wanting to know the best way to prepare your pond for an approaching storm or how to keep your koi safe from predators, a pond expert is going to know the answers to your questions. A pond professional will have years' worth of knowledge in terms of what works and what doesn't. Those tried-and-true tips are invaluable.

**You develop an ongoing relationship.** A pond professional is in the business for the long-haul and you can expect to count on them for support over the years. They will get to know you and your pond personally and can customize the information they provide when you call up to ask a question.

**Long-term cost savings.** Using a pond professional could cost you a little more at the onset, but it's absolutely cost effective in the long-run. That's because a pond that is installed and maintained properly, with available support when needed, will not require costly repairs.
Working with California Waterscapes

We would LOVE to be your pond professionals. At California Waterscapes, we are one of the fastest growing water feature installation companies in the United States, installing approximately eight to 10 water features per month in Southern California. It is both a passion and an expertise for us and we know we can provide value for your investment.

As a company that truly understands and has perfected the installation process, we can make sure that your project is done properly the first time so that you don't have to pay for repairs or problems that could have been prevented in the first place. And not only do we know how to properly install a water feature, but we also understand the natural biology of how a pond works. That means we're available to answer your questions and to provide expert advice in terms of maintenance and upkeep after your pond is installed.

We have installed many beautiful water feature projects for homeowners in Southern California and invite you to browse our design idea gallery.

If you're considering a water feature for your own property, contact us for a free consultation or give us a call at 818-244-4000 so we can answer some of your questions.