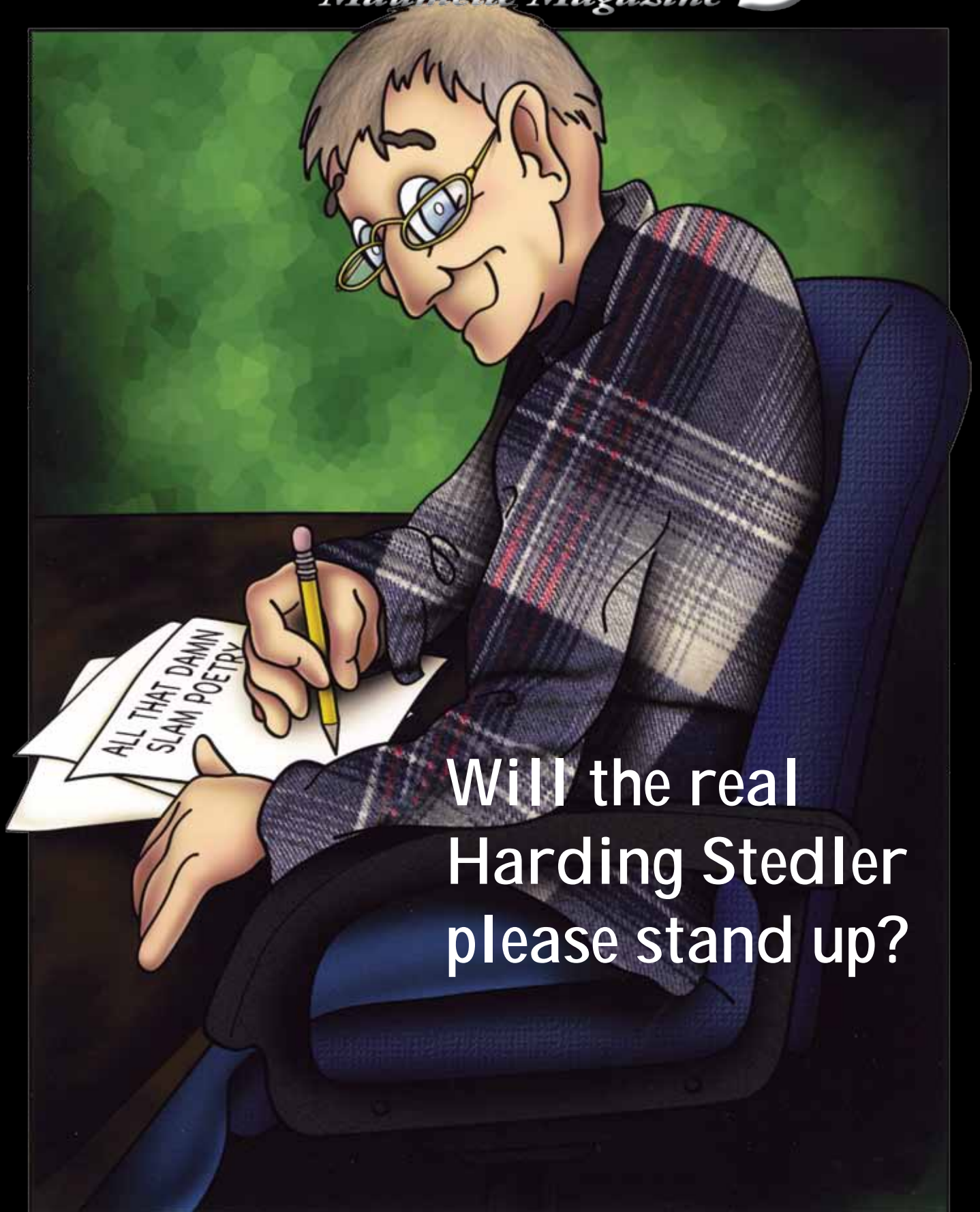


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I've Inherited a Pond, Now What?

By Shannon Goins



Many of us have found ourselves in the situation of having purchased a new home that has a pond or are taking care of someone's pond. If you have never owned a pond, this can be a very intimidating position in which to find yourself, but fear not! With a few simple tips, this situation need not be frightening. In fact, it could be downright relaxing.

First, assess the physical parameters of the pond and its equipment:

What size is the pond? This is important to know because it tells you how much pond salt, buffer, or medication you might need to add. Knowing the size of the pond is also critical to ensuring that you have the correct pump and filter size.

Most of us can't just look at a pond and determine its size in gallons. To aid us in this calculation are a plethora of online pond volume calculators. Just enter "Pond Volume Calculator" into any search engine, and you should find a screen that asks you for the following parameters: width, length, and depth at deepest point.

Grab a tape measure and a friend. Measure the width at its widest point and the length at its longest point. To determine the depth at its deepest point find a long implement such as a rake handle made of wood that will appear wet after it is pulled from the water.

Gently lower the rake handle into the water at different points and then use your tape measure to measure the length of the wet area on the handle.

What kind of filter and what is its capacity? Perhaps the most important thing about a pond is its filtration. There are many different types of pond filters available and what filter works best depends, among other things, on the size of the pond, its structural design, how heavily planted it is, and how many fish inhabit it. To describe each and every type of filter is beyond the scope of this article. You need to take a picture of the filtration system and take it to your local pond retailer for a consultation. However, there are a few things appropriate to point out here.

A common misconception is that the words "filter" and "pump" are interchangeable. A pump is a mechanical device that moves water from point A to point B. There is an intake area of the pump and an outflow area. A filter, by contrast, is the waste management system of the pond. It collects debris and serves as the "condominium" for beneficial bacteria that process decaying plant and animal matter in the pond, making the water safe for the pond's inhabitants.

Filters are commonly hooked up to the pond's main pump. Depending on the size and complexity of the pond, filters may take the form of a pre-filter box that fits onto the intake area, or it may be something as complex as a sand filter complete with back flushing capability. Re-

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Rafael Photography

Shannon Goins is a co-owner of NorthSide Aquatics, located on Counts Massie Rd. in Maumelle. She specializes in filtration and water quality management. Shannon welcomes everyone to stop in and see the new greenhouse water garden area at NorthSide Aquatics and join them on Facebook for the latest store updates.

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I've Inherited a Pond, Now What?

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member: just because a pond has a pump, even a very big one, does not mean that it has a proper filter. Take pictures along with any markings on the filter and pump to your local pond retailer. They can help you determine if your filter is adequate. If it is inadequate, they can suggest alternate filters or adjunct methods to increase your filter's capacity.

Pond Equipment



Assess the livestock situation:

Are there fish? If so, what kind? How many? Once you know the size of the pond, then you need to figure out if it is overstocked. The size of the pond determines what fish are appropriate. Koi require ponds over 1000 gallons. Yes, they really do grow to be over 3 feet in length! Goldfish, on the other hand, can be happy in smaller ponds. These fish can look similar to the untrained eye. One simple way to tell them apart is that koi have whiskers and

goldfish do not.

What you are likely to find is that your new pond is overstocked. It is not uncommon for previous owners to put a lot of fish in the pond to help sell the house. Sometimes existing fish have reproduced very successfully. Either way, if you find yourself with a 200 gallon pond and 20 koi, you need to find them a new home. Each pond is different, and filtration also plays a big part in this equation. Visit your local pond retailer for help in determining what is right for your particular setup. They can also provide you with ideas of how to find good homes for any fish you might need to give away.

The first thing you should do:

The first thing new pond owners should do is educate themselves about ponds. Most of the mistakes that are made by new pond owners are in the first few things that they do to their ponds. Here are some common examples:

Don't turn it off! Many people who inherit ponds simply turn the pumps off because they don't know how they work, or because they want to conserve energy. This is a bad idea because it can turn a pond that may have just a few problems into a complete disaster. Turning off the pump will deprive fish of oxygen and stagnant water will breed mosquitoes. Keep in mind that if your pond water is moving, you don't have to worry about mos-



Feeding

quitoes. This is why it is important to always pull water from one end of the pond with the pump and return it to the other end of the pond, either via a waterfall or by simply running the hose back into the pond.

Algae is not evil! It is common for new pond owners to immediately try to rid their ponds of algae. Ponds often have algae, and it is generally not a problem for fish. Ponds are ecosystems that are constantly in flux. There is a delicate balance that has to be reached in order for a pond to be nearly algae-free.

While it is advisable to clean your pond twice annually, once in the spring and once in the fall, a new pond owner should not do this until he or she understands how pond ecosystems work. The danger is that a pond may become so clean that there are no beneficial bacteria left to process the waste from the fish. This is a deadly situation. Even if you don't have fish, you can completely disrupt a perfectly running ecosystem and cause even more algae to grow than before. Consult with your local pond retailer, providing them with detailed information about your pond so they

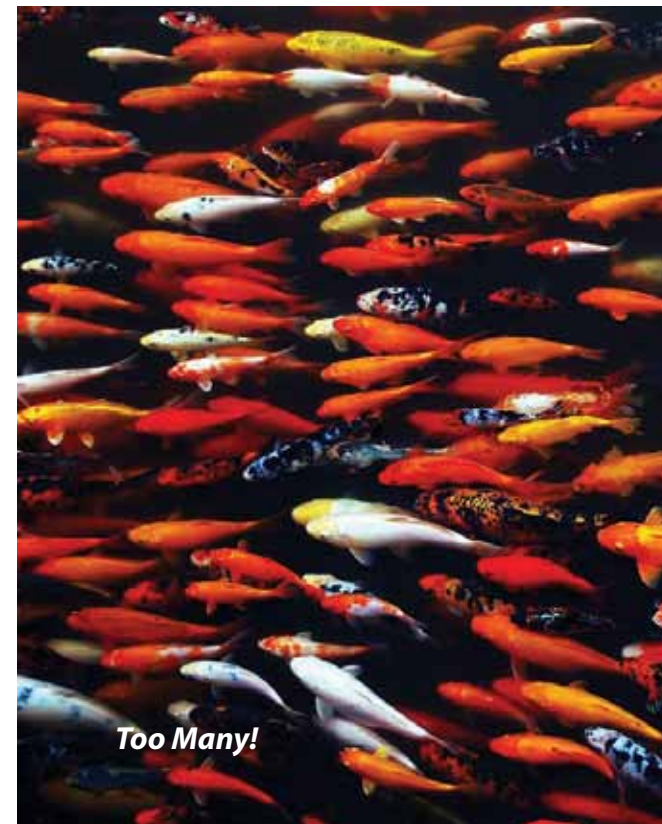
can advise you on the best way to clean and maintain it.

A note on adding new fish: So the pond has no fish, but you want some. Don't go run out and get as many \$0.15 feeder goldfish as you can carry and dump them all into your pond. First make sure that you have the right filtration to support fish. Then purchase fish that have been raised to be pets, not feeders. Feeder fish are generally not given the care that pet fish are and are likely to carry disease. Find a reputable store that sells fish intended to be pets. They will cost a little more, but you will make that money back by not having to spend it on medication later.

Learn how to feed: A final common problem is that new pond owners have never had to feed pond fish. Koi and goldfish will eat algae, bugs, and whatever else they can find in a pond. If you watch them carefully, they are always nibbling on something. Because of this behavior, they are not entirely dependent on commercial fish food. While it is fine to feed your fish, be sure never to feed more than once a day and feed only a very small amount of very high quality food.

Many of the less expensive foods contain filler and air. It is like continuously feeding them "cheesy poofs". To compare pond fish foods brands, hold two containers of food of comparable size, one in each hand. If one container is significantly lighter than the other, it is most likely full of filler and air. If you are feeding filler material to your fish, you can bet that it will produce more waste for your pond. If the fish cannot utilize the food that they eat, it is excreted. This excess waste contributes significantly to algae growth.

Finally, don't stress too much about the little things. It is common for new pond owners not to see the forest for the trees because they are trying to tweak every little thing to make the "perfect pond". Making hasty, radical changes can work against you. Instead of stressing out, sit back, relax, and enjoy what you have. In time you will learn to work in harmony with the ebb and flow of your new personal back yard ecosystem. ✦



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