



# PONDERINGS

Official Newsletter of The Tucson Watergardeners (TTW)

VOL IX MAY 2007 No. 4

[www.tucsonwatergardeners.org](http://www.tucsonwatergardeners.org)

## WATERGARDENING IN A BIG WAY!

What do you do if you have a swimming pool or spa that nobody uses very much or is in need of major fix-ups? After all, the hole is dug and plumbing and electrical work is already in place. How do you get from a sterile body of water constantly treated with chemicals to a working biological water feature? This may be your opportunity to take the plunge into a dreamed about mega watergarden!

Our focus this month will be on “extreme” watergardening with the conversion of pools and spas into oases, complete with plants, fish, or other aquatic life forms. Some of the reasons for undergoing such a conversion include: elimination of costly repairs and maintenance; ‘heavy-duty’ maintenance done more on a yearly, rather than weekly basis; saves the expense of purchasing chemicals; saves in energy costs to run pond, rather than pool equipment.

Our May program will address key factors to be considered in pool/spa conversions. Strategies for circulating water around the pond, including horsepower of the pump and pipe sizing and fittings are at the very heart of a successful conversion. Biofiltration and aeration are other major considerations.

Don't miss your opportunity to ask Carl Ragel, our program speaker, challenging questions! He's looking forward to kicking around ideas with TTW members. Really!

### PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDARS

**Board Meeting:** No May board meeting. The postponed April meeting may be rescheduled.

**General Meeting:** Thursday, May 24<sup>th</sup>  
7:30pm @ Jr League of Tucson  
2099 E River Road

**Program:** “Pool/Spa To Pond Conversions”  
By **Carl Ragel** (Member & Owner,  
Carl Ragel's Natural Pools & Gardens)

**Refreshments:** Betty Blackstock & Klara Cserny

**Door Prizes:** Share your “extra” plants & “stuff”



**Another Successful Water Plant Sale!<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> This is the third year that Mary Morse has served as TTW Plant Sale Chair (left), supported by Gail Barnhill (right), club founder. Paula and Preston Godfrey volunteer as cashiers, along with lots of other members donating time and expertise!

# Aquatic Plant Profile

Featuring Plants That Love Our Desert Water Gardens



**American Waterweed** (*Elodea Canadensis*)  
(Shown submerged under Parrot's Feather and water lily pads.)  
(Photo courtesy of Ann Marie Bonito's (member) garden.)

American Waterweed, also known as Anacharis, is a completely submerged plant that is an excellent oxygenator. It is part of the Hydrocharitaceae family of submersed aquatic herbs. While Anacharis is frequently used as an aquarium plant, it does well in our desert water gardens. Like other aquatic plants, it also has some notorious cousins, such as *Elodea densa*.

Oxygenators may not be on the top of the glamour list in terms of aquatic plants. However, their benefits include filtration; acting as a natural sponge to absorb sediment; and, protecting fish from predators. Anacharis has earned the nickname of "goldfish greens." There are claims that the oxygenators also help prevent pond algae.

Anacharis, with its whorls of deep green fern-like foliage, is a perennial that winters as an evergreen plant in our desert climate. It thrives in bright light, and its bloom includes small white flowers reaching the surface of the water. This oxygenator can simply be weighted down in the bottom of a pond, or even grown in a mesh bag. In refreshing your

pond, don't forget about oxygenators, as important in your mix of water plants!



## Greetings From The President!

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*Awesome!* Thank you to Gail Barnhill, TTW Club founder, and her assistants, Johnnie Guy and Sheri Anderson, for an informative and entertaining "Divide and Conquer" demonstration done on an ideal Tucson spring evening under the stars. We had terrific membership attendance, including a number of guests. A special thanks to those donating their root-bound aquatic plants, which were subjected to all sorts of dumping, tossing and cutting maneuvers. The best part is that many of us went home with a rhizome or two!

I also appreciated Wayne Tomczyk, TTW Vice President, taking charge of the gavel for April. As a reminder, we have a couple of Board of Director vacancies, one to October '07 and the other to October '08, with only four Board meetings each year. This is your chance to influence the club's future direction.

*Elizabeth Good*

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Horsehair Rush, Equisetaceae Family

name  
that  
aquatic  
plant...

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## '07 Water Plant Sale Stats & Facts

Earliest & latest customers: 7:30 AM & 1:30 PM  
96 paying customers: 75 non-members & 21 members  
\$ 650.00 worth of lilies sold  
\$ 1,300+/- in net sales!

Many, many thanks to all our sale volunteers and to those donating plants. And, kudos to our Chairs, Mary Morse and Oscar Skinner!



## PROFILING MEMBERS PROJECTS

When asked how this project should be referred to, Casey Case (member) usually will say, “You ought to see what we did to our pool –threw a bunch of plants and fish in and turned it into a pond!”

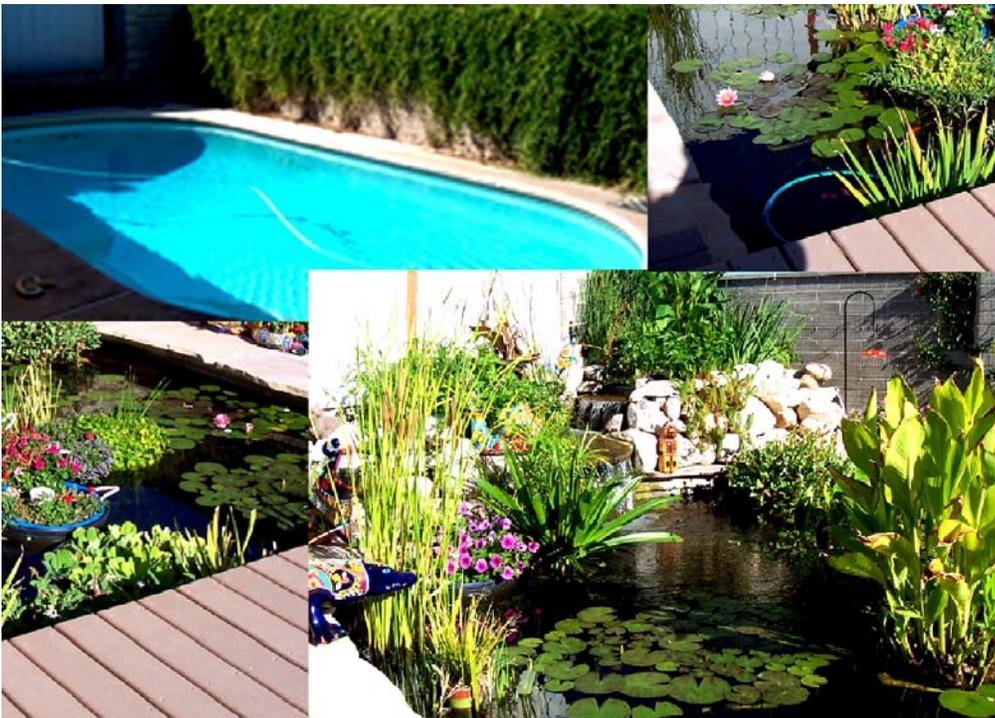
Casey and her husband, “Smokie” Steffe (member), faced a dilemma when the kids were gone. As a couple, they had little interest in swimming and allergies to chlorine. However, their creative thinking really got going when faced with the high cost of removing the pool and the real possibility of property devaluation without the pool. What to do? That’s when the idea of a water garden on a grand scale became a reality for them.

Working in close partnership with a local commercial company, it was important that the pool remained unaltered so that a future homeowner could reconvert back to a swimming pool. Another important part of their water garden design was that about half the pool would be covered by a deck. Results of their planning are a properly filtered and functioning ecosystem and a maxi-sized water garden!

Casey’s partiality to plants that flower is evident in the over 30 different kinds of plants that now populate her aquatic landscape. She’s also an experimental water gardener, and has a Dwarf Cherry Red Canna and a Mexican Petunia (Ruellia-type) that are doing well, despite being “land” plants! Casey expresses a special fondness for the Obedient Plant with its lavender flowers and the Water Celery with its variegated foliage. About one to two hours per week are spent in maintenance activities. “It’s play!” as she describes it.

And, what about lessons learned? Her advice is to pick a contractor who will take the time and is willing to work through the various problems with you. Don’t be cheap when it comes to size of pumps and filtration. The volume of the pool had to be reduced from 15,000 to 5,000-6,000 gallons, unless they wanted to spend thousands of dollars on filtration for 15,000 gallons of water.

What do they enjoy most about their water garden? “*EVERYTHING!*” Casey and Smokie feel it’s the best home improvement project they have ever tackled, and they would do it all over again in another house and another time.



The incredible 2005 transformation from stark pool to lush water garden.

### Some facts about this pool turned water garden:

- ◆ 5,500 gallons
- ◆ 1.5 hp 2 speed pump
- ◆ 300 gallon Rubbermaid trough with filtration pads and lava rocks
- ◆ Four water inlets
- ◆ Original pool skimmer as water outlet
- ◆ Mix of Koi & Goldfish including over 50 koi fry!
- ◆ Deck shades 50% of pond



## How About Your Pond?

This is your opportunity to help replenish funds for the TTW Grants Program, as part of the club's educational mission! As you go about your spring water garden sprucing up, it's not too early to be thinking about the **TTW 2007 Public Water Garden Tour**, currently scheduled for Sunday, September 9<sup>th</sup>. **All types of water gardens are needed!**

The club does carry liability insurance for the public tours. Of course, each garden should be free of safety hazards as much as possible and you can receive help with your garden write-ups. So, give your water garden that extra special touch, and, don't forget to call Gail Barnhill, our Public Tour Chair, and discuss your garden as a possible stop on the '07 parade of water gardens!

**Water Garden Chemistry.** Clear pond water doesn't always indicate healthy water, particularly in terms of fish survival. Regular water testing can alert you to your pond's balance of acidity or alkalinity. When you test your pond water you will essentially be looking at levels of pH, nitrites, nitrates, ammonia, and protein.

A healthy pH level is generally between 6.5 and 7.5, with 7.0 (neutral) being ideal. Water under pH 6.5 is acidic; water above pH 7.5 is alkaline water. It is advisable to test pH levels in the morning before plants become active and the pH levels go up. Always test around the same time each day for the most accurate pH evaluation of your pond. In addition to pH testing kits, any reputable pond store will have a selection of pH increasers and pH decreasers. Routine water changes are also helpful, when combined with a water conditioner and an ammonia chloramines remover, as needed.

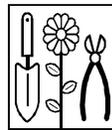
## This and That....

### 2007 Future Programs

- June:** "How to Make Your Own Fountain Head" By **Elizabeth Good** (TTW President)  
...A how-to program to add real drama to your water garden!
- July:** "Bees & Water Gardens" By **Tom Martin**, AAA Africanized Bee Removal Specialists, Inc.  
...Tucson region honeybee colonies - facts!

### FOR INFO TO GO

[www.tucsonwatergardeners.org](http://www.tucsonwatergardeners.org)

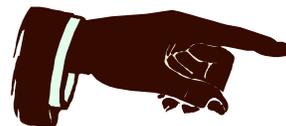


### Watergardening Classifieds

**Make a Note.** We are looking at Sunday, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, for a field trip to Sedona and a private tour of a very special water garden in Arizona's red rock country.

**Attention Watergardeners! Your deadline is the 4<sup>th</sup> of each month!** If you need something or have something you want to sell or trade related to water gardening, this is the place to advertise. Best of all, it's free!

*See you at our meeting!*



### TTW Contacts

- President:
- Vice Pres:
- Treasurer:
- Secretary:
- Membership
- Webmaster:
- Editor:
- Circulation: