

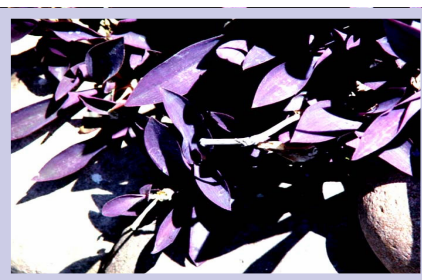
Ponderings

Ground Covers To Define Your Pond Or Watergarden Area

Ground covers are an excellent way to tie together your watergarden with the surrounding garden area. In its simplest definition, ground covers, usually done in mass plantings, are low-growing plants that spread quickly to form a dense cover. A variety of plants can be considered as ground covers, including sturdy perennials, annuals, trailing succulents, or even vines running on the ground.

Why use ground covers? In addition to visually defining your space, ground covers help prevent soil erosion and retard weed growth. They also can be grown in areas where other plants are impracticable, such as steep slopes, or exaggerated microclimates of intense heat or, conversely, deep shade.

Successful ground cover establishment depends on good soil conditions. Most ground covers spread by offshoots and are more apt to fill quickly where the soil has good aeration, drainage, and organic matter content.



Purple Heart as a Xeriscape Ground Cover

There is a misconception that ground covers are basically maintenance-free. That is generally not the case. Ground covers require care, refurbishing, fertilization, and pruning. Some experts feel that five years is the maximum life span of a ground cover in the lower Sonoran Desert areas, with the best planting times being mid-fall and early spring.

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NOTEWORTHY:

- Our focus this month is on hardscapes that surround your pond or watergarden and unify your whole garden area.
- Kudos to all who helped with the Plant Sale!



Ponders Calendar

General Meeting

Thursday, May 22nd 7:30 PM @ Junior League of Tucson 2099 E River Road

Program: "Walkable & Other Ground Covers For Around Your Pond" by Scott Warren, Mesquite Valley Growers Nursery

Door Prizes: Share your extra plants & stuff!

Board Notes

No May Board meeting. Mark your calendar for the next TTW Board meeting on June 19th. Host is Rod Minami.

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School of Hard Rocks

Your pond or water feature sits in the midst of *something* –that something is referred to as the “hardscape.” Hardscape is defined as the inanimate features of the landscape, such as garden structures, patios, retaining walls, and walkways made with hard materials. It is often the hardscaping that really sets off your water feature and draws your eye to the water garden that you have invested so much tender loving care and considerable sweat equity into.

With our water gardens located in southern Arizona, rock hardscapes are *HUGE!* There’s no shortage to the sizes and shapes of rocks available to add interest around your water garden. However, the key to success and making the most of your rock investment is to plan and sketch out on paper the location and type of rocks you have in mind. This helps a great deal in the shopping and pricing process. Most rock products are sold by weight.

Coming close to home, a lot of the locally available flagstone is quarried in Arizona. Flagstone comes in thinner, flat slabs. The random shapes of flagstone make terrific walkways and paths, with intriguing colors such as Oak, Buckskin, Rose, Chocolate and Sedona Red. Flagstone can also make interesting spillways for waterfalls into your pond or platforms either above the water or slightly submerged to hold plants. Many of the landscape rock suppliers around Tucson have broken pallets of flagstone, so it is possible to purchase only one or two slabs at a time.

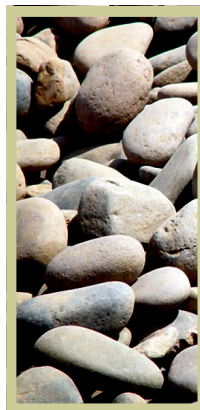
Your imagination --and wallet can go crazy with accent or feature rocks – ranging from those that can be carried to boulders that need to be set by machine. It is usually more pleasing to the eye to arrange accent rocks by groups of three or five –rather than placing a rock individually. To achieve a more natural effect for these

It is often the hardscaping that really sets off your water feature. Rock hardscapes are HUGE in southern Arizona!



larger rocks, it is better to bury at least 5% of the rock into the ground, so it doesn’t look like it has just been dumped and forgotten.

Avoid back strain and injury by moving heavy rocks sensibly. In lifting smaller ones, squat down and rise from the knees, back straight, rather than bending over from a standing position. For moving larger rocks, a lever and platform should be used. Most importantly, enlist help! There are also artificial rocks, and even those that can be personalized or engraved for your water garden area. Of course, an advantage of the artificial rocks is that they are much lighter to carry and place.



The smooth surfaced river rocks are very popular for hardscapes, and come in a variety of sizes from half inch to over eight inches. Did you know that most of the locally available river rock comes from the Salt River in central Arizona? A great way to extend your water feature is to trail a dry streambed of river rock around your pond or leading to or away from your pond. To make this hardscape look more natural, ornamental grasses can be planted to give the illusion of an actual flowing riverbed.

The smaller polished river rocks can also be set in designs and even combined with other media such as tiles and bricks. A “back mortaring” technique can be used to permanently set rocks, such as along a streambed to give the hardscape a very natural look.

Smaller areas of your hardscape can be filled in with crushed stone material, granite aggregates or pebbles. Most of the home improvement stores carry a wide variety of this type of stone –all packaged in manageable sizes for transporting home. These smaller pebbles and rocks can also be effectively used with actual water running through a streambed. Be sure to place vinyl liner and underlay as the “waterproof” layer to support a stone streambed. As a rule of thumb, allow 3-6” of water in the streambed. If you want more movement on the water’s surface, add larger river rocks until the surface is broken.

Rock placement at the bottom of your pond or streambed needs to be looked at very carefully to assure that the water flow is adequate and that pools of stagnated water are not being created. Organic debris caught between rocks can also be an issue when it’s time to clean up your pond. The flip side of rocks in your water feature is that the rock crevices are wonderful places to harbor beneficial pond bacteria. Be advised that there are several schools of thought about rock placement at the bottom of your pond, with some advocates recommending totally against it, opting, rather, for a smoother concrete or vinyl surface. To place rocks –or not to place them in the bottom of your pond is a matter of personal preference. But certainly don’t hesitate when it comes to incorporating rocks into your hardscape around your pond or water feature.



Plant Sale Stats & Facts

2008

92 Paying Customers (20 members; 54 non-members; 18 members signing up)

2007

96 Paying Customers (75 non-members; 21 members)

2008

\$3,202 +/- gross sales (before expenses)
Net Profit (not all costs in at time of printing)

2007

\$2,097 +/- gross sales (before expenses)
\$1,195.33 Net Profit

Worth Emphasizing:

Ponds need a mix of water plants, including:

Shallow Marginals (happy in 6" of water)

Deep Marginals (happy in 12" of water)

Deep Water Plants (such as waterlilies)

Submerged Oxygenators

Surface Floaters

Bog & Moisture Loving Plants

Rule of Thumb: 60-75% water surface shaded by plants helps control algae.

Visit our web site:

<http://tucsonwatergardeners.org/>



**Watergardening
Classifieds**

Mosquitofish. Looking to adopt mosquitofish (gambusia) for new pond. Call Jane, 760-1036.

Sell or Trade Water Garden Items.

Ad space is *free* to members!

President's Forum



At the very top of my list for this month is a round of thank you's to all the volunteers who made our May 4th Annual Plant Sale so successful! Give yourselves a huge pat on the back! And, speaking on behalf of the club, a very special note of appreciation goes out to Pam Glenn, this year's Plant Sale Chair, for all the behind-the-scenes preparation and coordination that she did to make our sale so successful. Pam, thank you for everything from mailing postcards to repotting and hauling all those plants —and even a few weeping willow trees!

In looking at our calendar for the rest of the year, the Board will be discussing moving the September 2008 Watergarden Tour from right after Labor Day to the third Sunday, September 21st. *Any input you have regarding this date change should go to me or one of our Board members.*

Elizabeth Good

Thought for the Month:
A pond is the eye of the garden...

2008 Future Programs

JUNE: Unique Tropical Aquatic Plants

JULY: Desert View Grant Update



President: Elizabeth Good gandegood@msn.com

Vice President: Ken Canada kcanada1@cox.net

Treasurer: Bill Hudson lloydhudson@cox.net

Secretary: Wayne Tomczyk waynet@us.ibm.com

Membership: Becky Costello wcostello1@cox.net

Webmaster: HL Swain hl@swain.net

Editor: JoAn Stolley jstolley@cox.net

Circulation: Bill Hudson lloydhudson@cox.net



The Tucson Watergardeners
9651 E. Watson Drive
Tucson, AZ 85730



To help develop an interest in the creation and care of water gardens...



Aquatic Plant Profile



Common Mare's-tail (*Hippuris vulgaris*)
Photos courtesy P. Glenn, Member

Mare's-tail, from the Hippuridaceae family, is a marginal plant that will certainly become a topic of conversation as it reaches maturity in your pond. This plant has submerged, stout rootstock that can be planted from shallow to water positions of one foot in

depth. What gives it the term "mare's-tail" are the elongated, upright stems with short, whirled linear leaf patterns. During the summer, the Mare's-tail has small, inconspicuous flowers along its stem, and does produce seeds.



Don't confuse Common Mare's-tail with Horsetail or Parrotsfeather!

This is an oxygenator that grows well in full sun, and is considered a perennial herb which has been used for a range of illnesses from stomach ulcers to closing wounds. Mare's-tail is found around the world in ponds and streams, and, given the right climate conditions, can become invasive.