

# The Spring Pond Clean-Out

Early spring, before your water garden completely awakens from its winter dormancy, is the best time of the year to perform a pond clean-out. Ideally, the cleaning should take place before the water temperature in the pond gets above 55° F. If a cleaning is performed after bacteria colonies form, the ecosystem will be thrown out of whack, and your pond will go through another “green phase” before your bacteria colonies re-establish themselves again.

The process of cleaning out the pond is fairly easy and can usually be done in less than one day. Be prepared, however, because it’s a messy, smelly job! If you don’t feel up to the task or you don’t have the time, we can come out and do it for you. For your convenience, below we have listed some of the steps involved in a spring cleaning as well as the materials needed. Please feel free to call The Mustard Seed at 952.361.9954 to answer any of your questions or stop by to purchase your pond supplies, fish or plants.

## Pond Clean-out Checklist

- Kiddie Pool (or smaller container to hold fish and frogs)
- 25 feet of 1.5” to 2” discharge piping
- A pump (the pump you use to circulate your pond will work)
- A high-pressure nozzle for you garden hose or a pressure washer with 1500-2500psi.
- Garden shears for trimming plants
- Several five gallon buckets to collect leaves and debris
- Wading boots or old clothes you don’t mind getting dirty
- Rubber gloves
- Bacteria
- Dechlorinator
- Extra rocks/pebbles
- Black waterfall foam
- New filter mats

- Aquatic plant fertilizer tabs
- Fish net

## 12 Steps for Success

- Disconnect the plumbing
- Drain the pond
- Catch the fish
- Remove debris
- Wash the pond
- Rinse the pond
- Clean or replace the filters
- Refill the pond
- De-chlorinate the water
- Acclimate the fish
- Add beneficial bacteria
- Sit back, relax and enjoy

## Getting Started

To drain the pond and prepare for a clean-out, follow these steps:

- Connect the discharge pipe to the pump that you have decided to use.
  - Place the pump in the deepest part of the pond.
  - Place the end of the discharge pipe so the water drains into the surrounding landscape. (Be sure to relocate the pipe two or three times to allow the water to seep into the ground and not flood the area.)
  - Use some of the pond water to fill the container that will temporarily house the fish.
- Fish should not be left in the holding container longer than a few hours, so a spring clean-out should be performed, start to finish, on the same day.
  - When the water is about six inches deep, Unplug the pump and catch the fish with your net.
  - Place your fish in the container alongside your pond, out of direct sunlight. (If you have Koi, do not forget to aerate the water and be sure to cover the container since they can jump out.

## Don't overdo the Cleaning

Once the fish and other critters are in their temporary holding tank, begin hosing down the inside of the pond. If your pond has rocks and gravel, you can clean them with a high-pressure nozzle connected to your hose or use a power washer. Don't try to scrub all the algae away as some algae on the rocks will prove beneficial in developing your ecosystem.

The most time-consuming part of your clean-out will be rinsing off and removing debris from your rocks and gravel. Starting with the top shelves first, use the garden hose to rinse the rocks and gravel, hand-picking any leaves or larger debris as you go. Continue to work your way down to the center of your pond. While you're doing this, the pump should continue to run. Any sediment or debris will be channeled to the deepest point, then removed and discharged by the pump. When the water starts clearing up around the pump, you can unplug it.

## How to Prepare the Filter

If you have a skimmer, use the pump to drain the water out and then hose it down. You can clean out the skimmer net and any filter pads at this time. If you have a BIOFALLS® filter, drain it and clean the mats and bags of lava rock by hosing them down until the water runs clear.

## Putting the fish back into the pond

Your clean-out is now done and your pond is prepared to run on its own for another year. You still need to put your fish and critters back into your pond as well as reconnect the pump. Once your pond is half full, you can reintroduce your fish and plants according to the following steps:

- If you're on city water, it's imperative that you add a de-chlorinator that removes chlorine, chloramines, ammonia, and heavy metals rendering the water fish-safe. Read the directions on the label, and add the appropriate amount.
- Dip the five gallon buckets into your holding tank and fill them with water.
- After you've caught your fish, place them in the buckets and set them in the clean pond.
- After about 15 minutes, periodically begin splashing some pond water into the bucket.
- By now, the temperature of the pond and the bucket water should be close to the same temperature and you're ready to spill the fish into their spring-cleaned home.
- Now you can re-connect your pump, plug it in, and you're ready for a new season.

Use these steps to maintain your water garden in the spring and help keep a clean, healthy and balanced ecological system. After the cleaning is done and the warmer spring temperatures raise the water temperature above 45°, don't forget to add additional bacteria. The bacteria populations are greatly reduced when water temps are below 45-50°, so we recommend adding additional bacteria during the early spring and late fall to keep the quantities of bacteria as high as possible. When water temperatures drop below 45°, such as winter, bacteria becomes inactive, so don't be surprised if your pond grows more algae. As the temperatures begin to rise in the spring, it will take some time for the bacteria to re-colonize and for your pond to become a balanced ecosystem again. By periodically seeding the bacteria and having aquatic plants and fish, you should notice less and less algae and a decreased amount of routine maintenance will be required. In just a short time, you will develop a simple maintenance routine and you'll have more time to relax and enjoy your water garden. Have fun!