

The Pond Comes Alive!

by Michel d'Estimauville, BSc.

With the spring weather warming up the pond, the various (multitude of) organisms come out of hibernation as a new cycle of growth begins all over again. Water bugs begin to appear, the fish become active and the plants begin to grow new shoots. In concert with this also comes the rapid multiplication of algae cells, which turn your water green. If you have debris at the bottom of your pond such as dead leaves from the fall, they begin to decay at an accelerated rate and thus liberating more nutrients to feed the algae.

If you have lots of plants in your pond, they will in time use up these nutrients for their own growth, and in a sense starve out the algae. As a result your water should clear nicely. So don't panic if your pond goes through a green stage when things first warm up. It is a normal part of the regular ecological cycle.

If you want to help things along, the introduction of beneficial bacteria will greatly speed up the cycling of organic matter as they use up the nutrients for their own growth. There are many different brands of these beneficial bacteria on the market, but the one that I particularly like is called Microbe-Lift. It comes in liquid form and you know that it is the "Real Stuff" by the rotten smell that it has. Don't worry, once in your pond the unpleasant odor will soon dissipate as these organisms go to work to restore the natural balance of your pond. Do make sure your water is well oxygenated, the water temperature is above 10 degrees C° and your UV light is turned off for the first two days after the introduction.

It is also a good time to divide your plants while they are actively growing and before the intense heat of summer. I am always amazed to see how vigorous aquatic plants can grow at this time, after their winter period of dormancy. They will quickly recover from the ordeal and grow even faster now that they have fresh new medium to push their roots into. If you are feeling intimidated by this, Skaha Water Gardens has a seminar on repotting aquatic plants each spring. We actually get dirty and split a bunch of plants. You're welcome to bring some of your own and we will do it together.

The fish also become a lot more active and come closer to the surface hoping to catch a bug or better still a handout from their keepers. The warmer waters will soon trigger their romantic behavior, which definitely adds interest to the pond as you watch them chase each other. Gold fish are quite prolific and, if the conditions are right in your pond, you will begin to notice tiny little fish hiding / darting amongst the plants.

The floating Water Hyacinths are great for raising fish, because their fern-like roots hang in the water. The fish love to lay their eggs in there, and later they provide excellent cover for the new



fry. I have more to say about this amazing plant, but you will have to wait for next month. Until then, I wish you many happy hours enjoying the out of doors.