

## Spring Cleaning Your Pond

by Michel d'Estimauville, BSc.

Spring is here. April is a good time to get into action to prepare the pond for another season. Once the fish are out of hibernation and they have begun eating again, I like to do a major pond clean up to get rid of any accumulated sludge at the bottom of my pond. It is good to get rid of the sludge once a year, because it harbors harmful organisms and it also contributes nutrients which feed unsightly algae.

The best way to do this is to completely empty out your pond. You can pump the water out, or use a siphon if there is a lower area to channel the water. I prefer the pump because it is much quicker, which means less stress on the fish. Unless your pond is quite small, don't try and catch the fish when the pond is full, because it will create stress for both you and the fish as you needlessly chase them around. It is much easier to catch them all when there are only a few inches of water left at the bottom. Make sure that you save some pond water in a large container where you will transfer the fish and keep it in the shade. Don't forget that raccoons love fishing out of a barrel during the night. Depending on the number of fish, the size of the container and the water temperature, your fish may need extra oxygen. You can do this by circulating the water with a small pump or you can use an air pump. You will know if that it is necessary when they hang around the surface gulping for air.

Back to the pond: once the pump (or siphon) starts sucking air, I like to use a shop vacuum to extract the rest of the water. After that it is relatively easy (and lots of fun) to scoop the semi solid sludge into buckets. Try to get as much of it out as you can easily remove. A squeegee comes in handy at this stage. Some people like to power wash the sides of their pond, but I don't recommend it because it removes much of the beneficial organisms which keep your pond balanced. That short green mossy algae on the sides is good for your pond. Remember, the object is to remove the sludge, not sterilize.

This is also a good time to clean up your plants, move the water lilies up from the bottom and make any other changes before you refill your pond.

If your water is chlorinated you must either use water conditioner (which is relatively cheap to purchase) to remove the chlorine. The alternative is to wait 2 to 3 days before you replace the fish. This allows the chlorine to evaporate out of the water, but make sure your fish are safe from predators, and remember that they like to jump out of small containers. I know this from experience.

The best part of this clean up is the feeling of satisfaction that you get once the fish are back in and swimming around.



They always seem happier. Remember, if you don't have the time to do this yourself, you can give Skaha Water Gardens a call and we would be happy to do it for you.