



Water Lilies

by Michel d'Estimauville, BSc.

Monet was so captivated by water lilies that he built a water garden on his property and spent hours painting his Nymphaeas. Similarly, it was my love of these plants that propelled me into the

water gardening world. At one point I moved my family off of a lakefront property to a more spacious location, so that I would have room to grow my cherished lily pads. So, what's so special about them?

Well, to me a pond is not really a pond, until it has water lilies. They seem to conjure up a feeling of tranquility, maybe because the pads lay so perfectly flat and still on the water. And the actual flowers which invoke pure beauty have a mystical quality about them. Their perfectly symmetrical cup like rosette of petals, face the heavens like an offering of exquisite delight. And if that isn't enough, bend down and let your nose take in the exotic perfume which will carry you into another world fit for goddesses.

Other than their pure aesthetic qualities, water lilies also do a great service to your pond by providing much needed shade. The reduced sunlight dampens the growth of algae and the leaves also offer natural protection for the fish. Some creatures use the pads for a landing, while others lay their eggs on the underside.

The plants originate from a tuber which grows horizontally on the surface of the soil, sending roots down and leaves and flower buds to the surface. This tuber not only grows larger in diameter, but it also grows lengthwise quite rapidly. That's why one of the secrets to growing the amazing plants successfully is to give them a lot of horizontal room. I like the 16 inch diameter lily pots as a minimum size, but as you go bigger, they become extremely heavy. Remember that water lilies are a heavy feeder; that means that they won't perform for you unless they receive a lot of fertilizer, either from fish wastes or by you feeding them. Also, if you want lots of blooms, they will have to be in full sun.

Hardy water lilies which survive our winters (providing they are below the ice level) come in several shades of red, pink, white, yellow and peach, while the tropical ones have the added colour of blue to their palette. And now it's time to return to my pond and let my imagination journey to the birth place of Claude Monet's "Water Lilies". (Photo to right: Michel in a pond full of different coloured water lilies.)

