

Preparing your pond for winter 1

One of the nice things about being a pond keeper is that it heightens your awareness of the seasonal cycles of nature. Like everything else in life, the pond perpetually changes with the seasons. After the (seemingly brief) long warm days of summer, when the pond was buzzing with life, it is now time to prepare for rest. Let's go over some of the simple preparations that you can do to prepare for winter.

The main hazard to your fish when the pond freezes over is methane gas, which comes mostly from rotting vegetation. Assuming that your pond is fairly clean, draping a net over your pond by mid October will keep the mass of leaves out of your pond. Additionally, you can cut back most plants and remove those yellowing water lily leaves. Don't cut the cattails back however, because they need the stems to carry oxygen down to the roots and besides, they look pretty in the winter with their golden straw colour against the snow.



Most marginal plants should stay right where they are, although there are a few exceptions. Arrowhead plants and pickerel survive better if they are deeper. Water lilies need to be dropped down to at least two feet of water (in the Okanagan) to keep their tubers from freezing. Plants that are above zone 6 on the hardiness scale need the extra protection and tropical plants of course need to come inside.

If your pump is in less than two feet of water or if it is inside of a skimmer, you will have to remove it for storage when the pond begins to freeze.

For the fish, switch to a cool weather food when the water temperature is below 10 degrees Celsius (usually early October), and stop feeding altogether when the water is below 5 degrees. The most important thing for winter is keeping an open hole in the ice, but please don't do this by chopping the ice which would be very unpleasant for the fish. There are various ways to accomplish this, but my favorite one is to use an air pump. Keep the end of the air hose (or air stone) at least 6 to 8 inches off of the bottom of the pond, so as not to disturb the bottom layer of warm water where the fish hibernate. The air bubbles will bring the warmer water to the surface and keep it ice free, and even if the hole closes during extreme cold, the air bubbles will still carry the deadly methane out through the sides of the pond.

So, now that you have prepared your pond for winter you too can slow down in harmony with the natural cycles of the seasons, confident that new life will emerge again after the winter rest.

