

## There's a snake in my pond!

Recently, one of my clients was telling me that her Goldfish had suddenly disappeared. It was a mystery because she had not seen any Great Blue Herons and there were no signs of a raccoon rampage. I told her that a snake may have paid a visit to her pond.

Garter snakes are actually a gardener's friend, often feeding on small rodents, slugs, amphibians and insects. They are quite common in the Okanagan, especially near water. You can easily recognize them by the light stripe that runs along the length of their body. These snakes are great swimmers and are just as much at home in water as they are on land. I have seen them wiggling through the water with grace and agility. It is a beautiful and fascinating sight, if only it wasn't my pet fish they were after! The good news is that a Garter snake will only swallow one whole fish at a time and then go off to digest it, after which they will keep wandering and may not return to your pond for a long time.



They prey on the smaller fish (usually under 3"), and will not clean out your pond as other predator's do. The surviving fish, having been terrorized by the ordeal of the chase, will go into hiding for a week or so. I told my client to continue offering a small sprinkle of food every day, so as to coax them back out. Some may scorn these snakes, but I see them more as a blessing and proof that I have

succeeded in reproducing a natural ecosystem. Goldfish are very prolific creatures, often overpopulating and overwhelming the capacity of the pond. So, I don't mind the occasional visit of a snake, which reminds me of the importance of shedding the old (skin) so that I can keep growing.