OUR WATER GARDENS: MAKING THEM AND PLANTING THEM: BY ALICE Lounsberry

Glimpse of water, mirrorlike and still, and a gracious flower floating like a swan majestically upon it is one of the fairest sights of Nature. It appeals to the emotions as well as to the vision. Within the last few years much has been said, much written about the facility with which water plants can be grown in streams and ponds conveniently near the home, in tubs sunken on the lawn, and in such other waters as lie on the landscape like mirrors reflecting the sky. The planting of water-lilies has been entered into with zest and its fascination widely extolled. And then in many instances, with the passing of the second season, has come a lull in the owner’s enthusiasm. The plants procured to decorate the waters have failed to live over the winter; their blooms have been small and scattered, or in some other way they have disappointed the high expectations. Occasionally so melancholy has been the experience of an amateur with water-lilies that their cultivation has been discontinued without deep searching as to the cause for the failure.

Water-lilies are like people: they have their individual temperaments, demanding, besides, certain cultural conditions in order to thrive. To grow them successfully requires not only a keen observation of them as specialized forms of growth, but also a certain hospitable acknowledgment of their demands. With increased understanding of horticulture, the futility of attempting too much on small plots of ground has come to be recognized, but the simple fact of not specializing closely on the kind of planting most suitable to the landscape has paved the way for errors innumerable.

Very few places of limited areas lend themselves to a variety of planting. To attempt a rock garden, a rose garden, a water garden, perennial planting, shrubbery and lawn decoration without wide and diversified acreage is, in the greater number of instances, a mistake. And of all the plants that are grown, none requires a more sympathetic setting than the lily that adorns the surface of lake or pool.

It has been demonstrated that some water-lilies will grow in tubs sunken on a lawn or even in a city backyard, thus giving delight to the beholder. Others only fully enjoy them when they are cultivated on the waters of the open country or seen in their natural state, wild on hidden pools.

Happily even on cultivated grounds Nature is rich in streams, in ponds and boggy pieces of lowland through which the water moves.
slowly. The latter is perhaps the most acceptable spot for a water
garden, since Nature has planned so well in advance that little
remains to be done in starting a lily pool other than to clear and
regulate the land, dam the stream and plant the pond. The natural
setting is in this case provided. In the coves of a stream, water-
lilies can also be grown, although before deciding on their location
it is well to notice where the force of the stream has formed a small
bay, and then to work this feature still farther inland until a restful
harbor is secured. Wherever soil has collected and natural vegeta-
tion sprung up along the shore, the opportunity should be grasped
to extend it as a planting ground for such grasses and shrubs as give
a harmonious frame to the lily picture.

Still it is important not to overdo these effects or the water will
take on an elaborated look entirely unlike the handiwork of Nature.
Simply the natural tendencies of the stream or pond should be
accentuated, and always in such a way as to make fit homes for
plants.

The most enticing of landscapes are those on one hand in which
Nature is controlled, or on the other, elaborated in harmony with her
original beauty. And since water is the natural element of reflection,
the value of its nearness to the country home can in no wise be over-
estimated. When it is absent in a natural form there is always the
artificial pool or basin to be considered; constructions, however,
which should not be entered into lightly since somewhat costly, and
only satisfactory when exceedingly well done.

The best of the artificial ponds are those that are dug out to
a depth of about three feet and then tightly cemented, water
being admitted gently at one end, let out at the other and
drained away into the nearest sewer. Over the bottom of such a
basin, rich soil should be deposited to the depth of eighteen inches,
renewed in all probability each season. The shores of all made
ponds and basins require also to be prepared with soil of rich quality,
that they may foster the growth designed to take away from them
the look of artificiality.

The importance of setting water plants in the right kind of soil
is very great. They are as voracious feeders as roses, and exhibit
their best only when placed in the richest mixture of mold and manure.
Two parts of well-rotted sods and one part cow manure has been
recommended as not too heavy for their nurture. The large natural
pond or stream wherein lilies are grown should be dug out along the
front, or wherever the plants are to be grown and replaced by at least
a foot of soil richer in quality. To attempt to grow many of the
beautiful varieties of water-lilies, *Nymphaeas*, without a just enrichment of the soil is merely to work toward disappointment.

The wild water-lilies thrive on decayed leaves and other vegetable matter accumulated in the murky bottoms of natural ponds; but the wonderful French and American hybrids, also the rare varieties from far-off lands, are not so readily satisfied.

The indigenous water-lilies of America are not numerous, the sweet-scented white water-lily or water-nymph being the most general in range and the best loved. In summer this lily floats calmly on the surface of the water and attracts to its golden heart the insects on which it relies for fertilization, drinking in meantime plentifully of life and sunshine. With its first foreboding of frost, however, it sinks to the bottom of the pond and nestles in the mud until the return of spring. The warmer water, heavier than ice, also remains at the bottom of the pond shielding it from the cold, like a coverlet. Frequently this native lily is seen in cultivation; although it is the hybrids, large of size and remarkable in color, that have given the greater impetus to decorative water planting.

Among these hybrids there are both tender and hardy sorts. The latter can be left in the pond all winter like the native, and will return to bloom the following season with the regularity of the daisies of the field. The tender ones, on the contrary, need to be taken up each autumn and stored in a greenhouse or cellar over the winter. For this reason it is customary to plant tender varieties in tubs, which in turn are sunk into the pond during the season of bloom, as it is only in this way that their cultural conditions can be well controlled. Water-lilies spread rapidly, so their root growth, which is often a serious problem when planted loosely in small ponds, is thus easily governed.

There are many people who find delight in these decorative water gardens and yet who confine their enthusiasm to the hardy varieties of *Nymphaeas* with perhaps a few natives added, and one or two such notable tender beauties as the *Nymphaea Zanzibariensis*—the wonderful royal blue lily of Zanzibar which stays open from eleven in the morning until five o’clock in the afternoon, upholding on stout stalks flowers sometimes ten inches in diameter. This variety of the water-lily is so splendid in color and texture that those who have no glass house or fitting place in which to keep it over the winter are willing to buy it anew each year in spite of the cost. As a decoration for a sheet of water it gives a poetical quality most ingratiating to the real flower-lover. Especially is it notable in contrast to the hardy *Nymphaea alba candidissima* and the tiny white variety, *Nymphaea pygmaea*.
Two views of the Nymphaea marliacea rosea, one of the most rank growing of beautiful lilies; the flowers are deep rose in color and often both leaves and flowers are lifted above the water.
THE HIGH HOUR OF BLOOM IN WHICH ALL WATER-LILIES OPEN THEIR FLOWERS AND SHOW THEIR GOLDEN CENTERS TO THE WORLD, INVITING THE WINGED FERTILIZERS OF THE INSECT WORLD.

LILIES GUARDED BY THEIR PADS AS EFFECTIVELY AS BY A REGIMENT OF SOLDIERS; THE ILLUSTRATION IS ONE NEVERTHELESS WHICH MAKES ONE WISH FOR A CLEARER GLIMPSE OF THE WATER AND FOR A LESS CLOSE PACKING OF THE LILIES' LOVELINESS.
AN ARTIFICIAL POND WHERE-IN TENDER LILIES, GRASSES AND OTHER PLANTS ARE CON-FINED IN TUBS AND SUNKEN IN THE WATER; THE TRAIL-ING VINES WHICH HAVE BEEN PLANTED ALONG THE EDGE OF THIS ARTIFICIAL POOL UNITE THE PLANT LIFE OF EARTH AND WATER NATUR-ALLY AND THEREFORE CHARMINGLY; ALL SENSE OF FORMALITY WHICH THE SEVERE LINE OF THE CON-CRETE RIM WOULD HAVE BROUGHT ABOUT IF LEFT UNBROKEN THEY HAVE ALSO GRACIOUSLY OVERCOME.

A NATURAL-ISTIC POND WITH GROWTH WELL CRAD-DATED DOWN TO THE WATER’S EDGE AND LILIES AND LILY PADS DECORATING ITS CALM SURFACE.
A pond in which the planting of the side banks makes sunny reflections and deep shadows in the water; hardy lilies are used here sparingly that the mirrorlike quality of the water may not be lost.
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In planting hardy water-lilies, it is only those set in early spring, or as soon as their rhizomes show signs of growth, that give blooms the same year. Nevertheless, all can be planted up to September if the intention is to establish bloom for the following year. Few water gardens are satisfactorily decorated in one season, for the work requires not only the preparation of the soil and the water, but later a framework of shrubs to connect the pool with the landscape. The planting of the lilies comes last of all. The plants that should be encouraged to grow about the borders of a decorated strip of water are for the most part well known and seldom expensive or difficult of growth. A stately willow leaning to the water and linking it to the landscape, alders, tamaracks, swamp maples, button bushes, swamp azaleas, green-leaved bamboo, Arundo donax, pampas grass, Eulalia Japonica, the well-known “cattails,” and Joe Pyeweed—these are among the larger plants that can be arranged and gradated so as to form a naturalistic framework and to bring the arrangement down to smaller plants. The latter include irises, the Japanese varieties that revel in moisture, cardinal flowers and blue lobelia, arrowheads and pickerel-weeds which grow fairly in the water, marsh marigolds with sunny spring bloom, and forget-me-nots, smallest of all, a blue fringe overhanging the bank and affording reflections that make one wonder if tiny fragments have fallen from the sky.

Securing the right reflections is one of the most difficult phases of water gardening. Should the entire surface of the pond be covered, monotony is sure to result. The mirrors in rooms had, no doubt, their inception in the sheets of water seen throughout Nature’s world as she reflects her works of art.

The water-lilies—natives, hybrids and tender varieties from the tropics—are the much-desired on all ornamental pools, and for such places they are the natural source of beauty in the same way that certain shrubs are inseparable from old-fashioned gardens. At the same time there is a plant of like character, larger and more striking in personality that is sharing their prestige in decorating America’s little waters, namely the lotus, Nelumbium speciosum, a native of the Orient and Australia, the flower of ancient Egypt and the inspiration of artistic design which has influenced the world. It is a glorified water-lily, with flowers wonderful in size, and an uplifted concave leaf as classic and beautiful as a piece of sculpture. This exotic Oriental water flower grows so luxuriously on the ponds and lagoons of this country that it has to be thinned out every season, or it would crowd all other water blossoms to extinction, completely covering the surface as it does with its mammoth leaves frequently
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two feet in diameter. Many ponds therefore show only this lotus and produce by its aid sumptuous decorative effects; for the lotus is fine in color as well as in form, and its seed vessels are unusually interesting. The familiar cornucopias were patterned after these seed pods, and it is believed that from the habit of the Egyptians of enveloping lotus seeds in a breadlike clay before planting them arises the saying: “Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days.”

At present the greater number of ornamental ponds and basins have come to show exclusively lotuses and lilies. But the better choice is with the lilies, unless space is unlimited. When the two are entered together the rare lilies should have their roots sunken in tubs so that the lotus tubers may be kept from encroaching upon them. The great leaves of the lotus, besides, keep off the sun from smaller flowers as completely as if they were green parasols.

Lotuses thrive in the richest, rankest mud that can be given them, particularly that in which there is considerable clay. Where there is room, they should be set in clumps or else used for individualistic beauty upon sheets of water showing no other forms of growth. Often the tubers of both water-lilies and lotuses have to be anchored with stones or bricks to keep them from rising to the surface of the water and floating away. But once established, the lotuses stand very severe winters and are, in fact, among the hardiest and most readily grown of all aquatics.

Perhaps the amateur planter desirous of decorating the water alluringly near his home will get the most varied interest out of the hardy water-lilies, dealing sparingly with those that are tender. In the way most appealing to his taste, however, his water property should be made to express a perennial joy. The idea that aquatics require expert care is now fortunately disproved. It had its origin, no doubt, in the failures caused by enthusiastic but unwise planting. The greater number of hardy water plants can be grown as easily as the most ordinary earth crops.

Not all nurserymen deal in the water plants, but there is now in this country a sufficient number able to furnish them and to give authentic information concerning their culture. The notion that none but a very rich man can have water gardens has been happily replaced by wide interest in their cultivation.