

"Just Add Water"

Articles and Photos by Soni Forsman



N. 'Pink Beauty' – hardy

Aquatic plant handbook

Using water in the landscape adds additional interest to the garden. It reflects its surroundings, attracts wildlife while emitting an aura of tranquility. Put aquatic plants in the water and it becomes a water garden. Aquatic plants are more than ornamental; they work 24/7 – oxygenating, filtering and shading the water.

These plants fall into one of four categories – surface, marginal/bog, floating and submerged or oxygenating. The classification indicates where the plant grows in the water garden and the role it plays in helping to achieve a biologically balanced one.

Surface Plants

Plants in this group are ones that are rooted in soil under the water and their flowers and pads float on the water's surface. The waterlily is the most recognizable plant in this category. Sometimes this classification of plants is referred to as 'deep-water plants,' meaning that they grow in deeper water than the other categories. In a natural pond, the waterlily is rooted in the bottom at a depth of four up to eight feet. In a man-made water garden, it is planted in its own container. If the water garden receives full sun, six hours or more, I grow the lilies with 12 but no more than 15 inches of water over the top of the container. Less sun but more than three hours, the waterlily should have seven to eight inches of water over the container.

Waterlily flowers float on or are held above the water's surface. The pads float, hiding fish from predatory birds. They also shade the water, depriving algae of sunlight. For the coverage to be effective in algae control, two-thirds of the water's surface should be covered with pads.

Waterlilies come in hardy and tropical varieties and in sizes suitable for the largest water gardens to the smallest decorative container. Hardy ones are perennials, returning year after year, if their rhizomes (roots) do not freeze. They are day bloomers, flowers opening in the morning and closing in the afternoon. Blooms last for three days. Once flowering begins in late spring/early summer, blooming continues into September. Hybrid hardy waterlilies are red, white, yellow, pink and shades that result from hybridization.

Some of my favorite varieties include *Nymphaea* 'Attraction' (red), *N. Chromatella*' (yellow), *N. 'Gladstone'* (white), *N. 'Pink Grapefruit'* (light pink/yellow), *N. 'Joey Tomocik'* (yellow), *N. 'Colorado'* (apricot) and *N. 'Pink Beauty.'* Small varieties include *N. 'Helvola'* (yellow) – featured last month- and *N. 'Little Sue'* (sunset).

Tropical waterlilies are placed in the water garden in the spring when the water temperatures reaches 70 F, that is usually the first week of June here. In this climate, tropical lilies are considered annual plants but can be saved by harvesting the tubers it may produce. (That is the subject for another article, if there is interest).

The blooms of most tropical varieties are larger in size than their hardy relatives and available in more colors, including blue/purple. The blooms of these lilies stand well above the water, making them visible from a distance. Most tropicals are day-bloomers but some open in the evening and remain open until the following morning. Tropical blooms also open and close for three days.



***N.* 'Trudy Slocum' - tropical night-bloomer**



***N.* 'Lindsey Woods' - tropical day bloomer**

Day-blooming tropical choices include *N.* 'Lindsey Woods' (purple), *N.* 'King of Siam' (purple), *N.* 'Kathy McLane' (pink) and *N.* 'Blue Beauty.' Night-bloomers include *N.* 'Trudy Slocum' (white), *N.* Jennifer Rebecca' (red) and *N.* Rosa

Other surface plants are water poppy, water snowflake, water fringe and floating heart. These plants grow quickly and may cover more of the water's surface than desired.

I will cover the other classifications in next month's newsletter.