

"Just Add Water"

Articles and Photos by Soni Forsman

Pondering winter prep

I start to think about shutting down our water garden for the winter shortly after Labor Day. Dismantling my container water gardens is also part of that planning. No physical work in September; just preparing mentally for the annual October ritual.

We start this work in early October with a finish date of no later than the weekend before Halloween. Remember the infamous 1991 Halloween blizzard? If you don't, someone in the club will tell you how the usual 30-minute commute became a many-hour nightmare. There are also stories about water gardens/features not ready for the winter.

Through late summer, I continue to maintain the big and small water gardens, keeping them looking as neat possible. As I move from container to container, I look at the tropical marginal plants that summered in these small gardens. Will I move them in to winter as houseplants, encourage them to go dormant for storage or toss and replace next season?

As time has marched on, I've sort of lost interest in lugging them inside in the fall only to carry out in the spring. I now dispose of those tropical water plants that are readily available at most garden centers in the spring. Examples include some *Colocasia* (taro) cultivars as well *Cyperus papyrus* varieties. These plants and others that can tolerate moisture are usually displayed with the tropical plants or the ornamental grasses.

In my early years of water gardening, I only tossed water hyacinth, water lettuce and parrot feather and wintered the remainder, using one of the wintering options. The *Cyperus papyrus* varieties would spend the winter sitting in watertight containers in sunny or bright locations. I stored taros, cannas and other plants that have tubers/corms in peat moss in a dark location. To prepare them for storage, I removed them from the water to dry out. Once dry, I took them out of their pots, cleaned off the soil and placed in individual containers with peat moss and name tag. Late winter, I moved the pots into a lighter location and occasionally splashed with a little water to encourage some growth before moving outside to repot. Other tropical plants that I liked, would sit in water under fluorescent lights. Most survived to live another summer.

Now I only winter a couple plants; ones that I consider unique or ones that are not usually available locally. I'm enjoying starting over each spring. In fact, sometimes I don't replace but try something new to me.



Cyperus involucratus 'Baby Tut' is available at most garden centers in the spring.

It could be wintered as a houseplant in the container where it spent the summer.

Water hyacinth and water lettuce will be treated as annual plants.



The bulb of Canna 'African Sunset' can be saved and stored dry in peat moss for the winter