

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 93

Reliable Plants for Ponds

Finding plants that will do well in a pond can be hard. Some pond plants without the proper care will die very quickly. Water lettuce, water hyacinth and water lilies are three very reliable plants to use in your pond.

Water Lettuce

Water lettuce is a free-floating aquatic plant that rapidly grows but can serve as a breeding ground for mosquitoes. Water lettuce spreads both by vegetative reproduction and by seeds. As the name suggests, the entire plant resembles a small, floating, open head of lettuce.

The aquatic perennial is spongy and consists of a floating rosette of pale-green, fan-shaped leaves covered with hairs. These hairs trap air and give the plant its buoyancy. It has fibrous roots.

Mature plants produce many small, green, inconspicuous flowers in their centre. A membrane separates the male and female flowers. The fruit is a berry with oblong seeds tapered at each end.

Seeds on the muddy bottom germinate from late November to early December and float to the surface as seedlings. Propagation is through flower pollination or by stolons, which produce daughter plants.

Water lettuce is sensitive to frost and can grow in polluted water.

Water Hyacinth

The water hyacinth has special adaptations to allow it to grow and spread rapidly in fresh water. It can withstand extremes of nutrient supply, pH level and temperature, and can even grow in toxic water; however, it grows best in still or slow-moving water.

The seeds are dispersed by birds and can remain viable for 15 to 20 years. The main method of reproduction, however, is vegetative, through stolons. The plants produce beautiful purple flowers.

Water Lily

The flowers or the water lily are wonderfully showy and fragrant, lasting only a few days. The fragrant water lily has a unique pollination strategy.

On the first day that the flower blooms, a fluid fills the centre of the flower, covering the female parts. Should an insect visit the flower, the design of the petals causes it to fall into the fluid. If the insect is covered in pollen, the pollen dissolves in the fluid and fertilizes the flower. The next day, pollen is released.

A few days after the water lily is pollinated, the flower stem tightens in a spiraling spring to bring the flower head underwater. The fruit develops into a spongy berry with many seeds.

The flat, round leaves have a waxy water-repellent upper side. The underside, however, seems to cling to the water by surface tension. Some water-lily leaves are purple underneath, the pigments helping to concentrate the sunlight to maximize photosynthesis.

Water lilies grow best in calm, fresh water.

Water lettuce, water hyacinth and water lily all work well in the same environment because of their contrasting textures and varied shapes.

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