



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Not everything in the following FAQ sheet may apply to you, but here are some answers to a few generally-asked questions, which may save you the trouble of a phone call.

### **Why is the pump just plugged in? Can I hard-wire it?**

The pump is designed to plug in for a couple of reasons. First, it is designed to plug directly into a standard GFCI outlet and doesn't need hard-wiring. Second, it makes the pump much easier to service. If you choose to hard-wire the pump, be aware that you will pay additional service call fees for us to perform service or warranty work.

### **Why are the rocks covered with green fuzz?**

That green fuzz is filamentous (string) algae. It is perfectly normal and natural for an organic water garden to have some of that below the water's surface. If it gets out of control (3+ inches in length), refer to the trouble-shooting sheet for options.

### **When can I add fish? How many fish can I have?**

You should wait at least two weeks after the aquatic plants have been installed before introducing Koi or decorative goldfish to your pond. We recommend purchasing small fish (3-5" in length); otherwise, they could wreak havoc on your newly-planted aquatics. The number of Koi fish is calculated as: 1" of fish per cubic foot of water<sup>1</sup>. You can have a few more goldfish than Koi, should you desire to go that route. You can also mix the two, substituting two goldfish for every Koi. These are general rules of thumb to follow. Good judgment and common sense should always prevail.

### **How often, and how much, should I feed my fish?**

Feeding your fish is rarely, if ever, necessary. They will live just fine without the addition of commercial fish food, surviving on plant material and visiting insect life. Most people, however, enjoy feeding their fish on occasion, and it does make them friendlier pets. Only feed your fish what they can eat before it hits the skimmer, and once a day is plenty. If you over-feed them, not only are you wasting the food, but you are creating an environment where string and free-floating algae can flourish, not to mention you'll need more filtration as they become whales.

Do not feed your fish commercial protein fish food in the winter months when the water temperature drops below 60°. Their metabolism slows down considerably in the cold weather, preventing them from digesting the protein-rich commercial foods on the

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<sup>1</sup> This formula is a rule-of-thumb used in the industry. Balance is the key. Your pond is new, so start slowly and add fish as the pond matures.

market. You could actually feed them to death! During that time, however, you can give them natural treats such as watermelon, zucchini, oranges and lettuce. There are even YouTube videos that show you how to train your fish to enjoy this type of feeding.

### **Can I add aquatic plants?**

Absolutely! Have a ball, and experiment with any number of aquatic plants on the market, usually more readily available in the spring. You'll have to check with your local nurseries as to availability and cost, as this varies greatly. You can get plants on-line, but it's a gamble as to whether or not they'll survive. Many folks shop around and add tropical water lilies, papyrus, Louisiana iris varieties, etc., to their pond. Some people are even experimenting with food plants. The more diverse the plant mix in the pond, the less chance string algae has of taking hold. And it's a marvelous place to garden when it's 110° outside! If your pond is new (less than 6 months old), you may need to add a fertilizer tab when you introduce a new lily or marginal. Otherwise, we don't recommend fertilizer for the aquatic plants because it's also a source of food for string algae.

### **Does the water get too hot in the summer or too cold in the winter for the fish?**

Not at all. The combination of the 24/7 water circulation and the shade on the pond via aquatic and terrestrial plants keep the temperature reasonable in the summer time. You will notice that the fish hang out in the shade of the lily pads and marginal plants during the sunny time of day. The fish's metabolism slows considerably in the winter time, allowing them to even hibernate below several inches of ice in the colder regions.

### **Is my pH level too high?**

Arizona has alkali water. This means that your pH levels will run between 8.5 and 9.5, and all the books are telling you that pH should be a neutral 7.8. You DO NOT need to try to lower the pH. The fish and plants will acclimate, which is easier than trying to maintain a neutral pH, and could even be stressful for the fish – and a losing battle for you considering that every time new water is added to the pond, it is at our high pH.

### **Do I ever need to drain and clean the pond?**

Once a year, in the spring, we recommend a clean-out of the pond, especially the biological filter (and this includes the "pondless" waterfalls). The extent of this cleaning depends on the age of the pond and fish load, as well as other factors that are fairly easy to assess visually. This is something that can be done yourself, or you can hire us to do it for you. The instructions for doing this job are in your Owner's Manual, as well as on our website. We also offer a free training seminar early each spring, which will teach you how to do this yourself. If want us to perform the service, look for the forms to come to you in mid November, with a December deadline, for a February-March service.

#### **The Garden Gnome, L.L.C. dba The Pond Gnome**

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### **How often do I need to clean out the skimmer?**

This depends greatly on how much debris is falling into the pond at any given time. You may find that this also differs depending on the time of year. We recommend that you check the skimmer basket at least weekly, even if it's just to look inside and make sure it's not full yet. The skimmer pad should be hosed off occasionally, probably every two or three months.

### **How often do I need to clean out the biofilter?**

This area is supposed to be a swamp! It is where the beneficial bacteria live and breed to keep your water crystal clear. It is meant to only be cleaned out once a year, in the early spring, and then it will need to be re-seeded with bacteria because every time you clean this filter, you are basically starting over with your ecosystem.

### **Where can I get more water treatment products?**

Water treatment products can be purchased through the on-line shopping link on our website at [PondGnome.com](http://PondGnome.com). You will be looking for AquaClearer bacteria if your water is cloudy. If you have string algae, you want S.A.B. (String Algae Buster) or EcoBlast (cold water months).

### **How many gallons is my pond?**

The formula for this is to multiply the length, times the width, times the average depth. Then multiply that number by 7.25.

### **What do I do about pest and/or weed control around the pond?**

We recommend organic remedies to these problems, such as integrated pest management (IPM): good guys to eat the bad guys. Hummingbirds, flycatchers, western toads, dragonflies, and damselflies will automatically show up to most ponds to help out with pest problems. If you have a pond, we add mosquito eating minnows to take care of that annoyance. White vinegar makes a fairly effective weed control method for most weeds. If you must use an herbicide, make sure there is no wind and that your application is accurate. We DO NOT recommend you spray any chemical herbicide or pesticide within 50 feet of your pond or water feature. Inform your service, if you have one, of this requirement. Yes, it's true that the poison is harmless once dry; however, it will never dry out if it hits the pond water, and can cause catastrophic results. For more information on integrated pest management, you can contact the Master Gardeners at 602-470-8086, or visit their website at [www.maricopamastergardeners.com](http://www.maricopamastergardeners.com).

### **Why did my water turn pea-green?**

If your pond is new, this is a normal occurrence. Not all ponds go through this phase of Genesis, but many do. Just keep adding the AquaClearer bacteria according to the directions, and it should clear up within a few days. Once the water clears up, begin backing off of the bacteria as long as it stays clear.

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