15 Beautiful Pond Plants For Your Water Garden

Check out these pond plant profiles to inspire the choices you make for your water garden.

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Nymphaea gigantica has purple-blue flowers and is so large that it needs a lot of water surface space and water depth. Photo credit: Patricia Knight

Parrot's feather (Myriophyllum aquaticum) can grow in many ways: floating on the pond surface, planted in gravel and in wet soil out of water. Photo credit: Cassandra Radcliff

There are so many beautiful plants that can be planted in, on and around ponds that it can be almost impossible to choose which ones to include in your pond. Beauty is subjective, and while my favorite plants feature striped foliage, such as the Canna 'Pretoria' hybrid and sweet manna grass (both marginals), you may work all season long for just one amazing set of iris blooms that you can cut and display in a vase indoors. Use the plants that you find beautiful; plant them in your pond in such a way that they complement each other, then give them the correct care so that they stay beautiful.

If you are trying to decide which plants to incorporate with your pond, use the 15 plants in this article to get inspired and then browse online and in pond books and catalogs. Once you find a good number of submerged, floating, marginal and bog plants you like (choose some from all categories so that you will have a balanced ecosystem), you can narrow down your selections based on each plant's size and care requirements.

5 Marginal Plants
Marginal plants are placed in the shallow areas of the pond, usually on "shelves" in pots. These are often tall, dramatic plants that add vertical interest to a pond. Beautiful marginals can add interest with a variety of flowers, variegated or bold-colored leaves, shapes and heights.

1. Iris (Iris spp.). Irises have tall, swordlike foliage and are richly diverse in their flower colors and types. There are so many sizes and colors that any pondkeeper will be able to find a variety to suit his or her tastes. The purple and white flowers of Iris laevigata 'Colchesterensis' and the bold yellow flag iris (I. pesudacorus) are two striking varieties. Yellow flag iris is so good at absorbing excess pond nutrients through its roots that it is often used in water treatment ponds. Plant a large number of irises together for the best visual effect.

Sun: Full sun
Planting depth: 6 to 10 inches below the water surface
Size: Due to the diversity of the genus, Iris height ranges from 2 to 4 feet.
Hardiness: Because there are so many species of Iris, research yours to find its particular zone. Zones for most species can range from Zones 4 to 9.

2. Cattail (Typha spp.). The cattail plant, often called bulrush, is a common sight in wetland areas. Its long, swordlike leaves, which can be striped with a cream color in some varieties, are accompanied by sausage-like brown flowers in the summer. Cattails can be invasive, so plant them in pots instead of directly into soil. This will prevent them from spreading. Their seeds develop in a cottony fluff and will blow away in the wind. Cut cattail flowers and display them indoors to prevent their seeds from blowing away.

Sun: Full sun to partial shade
Planting depth: Plant 6 to 12 inches deep in the water, depending on the height of the species
Size: Depending on the species, cattails can grow from 1 foot to 10 feet tall. Dwarf cattail (T. minima) is best for smaller ponds.
Hardiness: Zones 3 to 10, depending on the species

3. Umbrella palm (Cyperus spp.). The umbrella palm is a tall marginal and is striking when grown in dense clumps. This plant has umbrellalike leaves at the tops of its tall reeds that bloom with inconspicuous green flowers.

Sun: Full sun
Planting depth: Plant from 2 to 6 inches deep in water, depending on the size of the species
Size: Can grow from 1.5 feet to 15 feet tall, depending on the species. Cyperus alternifolius is a smaller species, only growing to 3 feet, while C. papyrus can grow to 10 feet tall.
Hardiness: Some species are hardy to Zone 7 (meaning that they will grow from the warmer Zones down to Zone 7)
4. Arrowhead plant (Sagittaria latifolia). The arrowhead plant, also called duck potato, is easy to grow in calm waters. In the summer, its arrow-shaped leaves are accompanied by white blooms, which form on spikes. Keep an eye out for aphids and spray them off with a hose as soon as you see them. Pond fish will gobble up the aphids.

**Sun:** Full sun to partial shade  
**Planting depth:** Plant in a water depth of 6 inches  
**Size:** Can grow up to 5 feet tall and 2 feet across  
**Hardiness:** Zones 4 to 11

5. Canna ‘Pretoria’ (or other Canna hybrids). Canna hybrids not only have the large, attractive foliage of the wild Canna species, but over the years horticulturalists have developed hybrids with larger and more showy flowers. Canna ‘Pretoria’ is an exceptionally beautiful plant, having large yellow-and-green-striped leaves and impressive yellow-orange flowers. Other hybrids can have red, orange, yellow, pink, cream or white flowers (or color combinations of these) with green, red or variegated leaves.

**Sun:** Full sun  
**Planting depth:** Plant 6 inches deep  
**Size:** Depending on the variety, Canna can grow from 1.5 feet tall and 1.5 feet wide to 6 feet tall and 3 feet wide. Canna ‘Pretoria’ is one of the larger hybrids.  
**Hardiness:** Hardy to Zone 7

5 Floating Plants
Floating plants add interest to the pond surface, as well as remove nutrients from the water with their dangling roots (this is why they usually do not need supplemental fertilization). Several plants mentioned in this section (and many other popular pond plants) are invasive and quickly cover a pond’s surface. Manually remove these plants so that they do not block the surface and take over your pond. And just as with any plant or animal, never allow floating plants to be released into wild habitats.

1. Carolina fairy moss (Azolla filiculoides, syn. A. caroliniana). This native floating aquatic fern has bright green velvety leaves that turn red in cooler water. The fronds of this plant resemble scales. It uses symbiotic cyanobacteria to get nitrogen out of the water and air, and because of its high nitrogen content, Carolina fairy moss is often used as fertilizer. Fish may eat this plant.

**Sun:** Full sun to partial shade  
**Size:** Each frond is less than half an inch long, but Carolina fairy moss will spread across a pond quickly.  
**Hardiness:** Hardy from Zone 7 to 10

2. Water hyacinth (Eichhornia crassipes). Water hyacinth plants, which float due to their air-filled stems, have waxy green leaves and send up 6-inch-tall flower spikes with light purple blooms (with a spot of yellow near the center) in the summer. The blooms only last for one day, but flower spikes can have up to 15 flowers. Fish will use the long, dangling roots of water hyacinth as a spawning area, and roots also provide shelter and tiny foods for fry. Water hyacinth is efficient at removing excess nutrients from water. This plant grows quickly by sending out runners and is invasive in the southern United States, so you will need to thin it out often.

**Sun:** Full sun  
**Size:** From a few inches to 3 feet  
**Hardiness:** Zone 8. Overwinter water hyacinth in a container indoors.

3. Parrot' feather (Myriophyllum aquaticum). Parrot's feather can grow in many ways: floating on the pond surface, planted in gravel and in wet soil out of water. Its stems grow up to 5 feet long. Fish will often lay their eggs and take cover in this plant's feathery green foliage.

**Sun:** Full sun to partial shade  
**Size:** Can grow to 6 feet long  
**Hardiness:** Hardy to Zone 6. It can be left outdoors all year and can overwinter in frozen ponds.

4. Common frogbit (Hydrocharis morsus-ranae). Frogbit resembles a mini waterlily with floating leaves. Its half-inch-wide, three-petaled papery white blooms have cheery yellow centers.

**Sun:** Full to partial sun  
**Size:** Although this plant is tiny (each leaf only growing 1 to 2 inches), it can quickly grow to a large mass that chokes out other life in wild habitats. Common frogbit is invasive and should never be released.  
**Hardiness:** Zones 7 to 10

5. Water velvet (Salvinia minima). Also called water fern, this tiny, floating bright green fern has two conjoined oval leaves covered with many bristly hairs. Its rootlike structures are actually modified fronds. For best results, keep this floating plant...
in calm water.
Sun: Full sun to partial shade
Size: Leaves grow to half an inch, but collectively they will spread over a large area of the pond surface.
Hardiness: Hardy to Zone 10

5 Waterlily Varieties
Waterlilies generally have similar care, needing full sun, calm water and adequate space. They need to be potted correctly in plastic baskets and placed at the correct depth in the pond. As the lily grows, lower the plant basket gradually until it sits on the bottom. You will need to prune dying leaves, spent blooms, fertilize, re-pot, and you may need to overwinter your lilies. Learn how to care for your lily species and variety, and know which types you can grow in your pond before purchasing any lily.

There is an intimidating amount of waterlilies available to the pondkeeper. There are about 70 species in eight genera in the family Nymphaeaceae, as well as many manmade hybrids and varieties. The Nymphaea genus contains the largest amount of species in the family (about 50), and these species come in many beautiful shapes, sizes and colors. There are five spectacular varieties available to pondkeepers.

1. Nymphaea 'Saint Louis Gold'
Size: Up to 5 feet across with a 5-inch bloom
Distinguishing Characteristics: These sweet-smelling yellow lillies display a bronzy color on their new leaves.
Tips: This day-bloomer can tolerate cold (to about Zone 5). Look for first flowers in the middle of summer.

2. Nymphaea gigantica
Size: Grows to 6 to 9 feet across with almost 10-inch blooms.
Distinguishing Characteristics: This tropical lily has purple-blue flowers and is so large that it needs a lot of water surface space and water depth (1.5 to 3 feet deep).
Tips: Just as its species name implies, N. gigantea is only appropriate for very large ponds. Tropical day-bloomer.

3. Nymphaea 'Gloriosa'
Size: Up to 4 to 5 feet wide with a 5-inch flower bloom.
Distinguishing Characteristics: This lily has deep red blooms that are just barely fragrant. New leaves have a green and purple mottled coloration.
Tips: This lily can tolerate some shade. Hardy day-bloomer.

4. Nymphaea odorata 'Minor'
Size: Spreads about 3 feet across and has 2- to 3-inch flowers.
Distinguishing Characteristics: Just as its species name suggests, this tiny white pygmy lily has a sweet fragrance.
Tips: This is the smallest white lily, perfect for small water gardens and container ponds. It may be more difficult to find in stores, but it's worth the work finding it if you want a lily to thrive in a small pond. Hardy day-bloomer.

5. Nymphaea 'Charles de Meurville'
Size: Grows to 4 to 5 feet wide with blooms up to 7 inches across.
Distinguishing Characteristics: This wine-red flower with white tips has a long flowering period. It is one of the first lilies to bloom in the spring.
Tips: This lily is susceptible to crown rot. Hardy day-bloomer.

Underwater Plants
Underwater plants are essential to the health of a garden pond and to any resident fish. Even though they are not as conspicuous as marginals and floating plants, they play an important role in keeping a pond beautiful. Not only do they provide oxygen to fish, something to snack on and an area for young fish fry to hide, oxygenators help absorb nitrates from the water. Underwater plants use excess nutrients from fish waste, uneaten fish food, etc., for nutrients, which helps cut down on algae. While these plants are appreciated for their beauty in aquariums, underwater pond plants take a backseat to the more showy floating plants.

Some underwater plants, such as Cabomba and Anacharis, will send flowers to the water surface. You will also enjoy the beauty of your underwater plants when you watch your fish swimming in and out from under them. Keep these key pond plants healthy by allowing some open water surface area so that they get enough light for photosynthesis.

Remember that beautiful plants will only stay beautiful if you can provide them with the correct care. If a striking plant catches your eye, thoroughly research its care requirements. There's nothing worse than seeing a beautiful lily that should
reside in a large pond wither and rot away in a small pond. If you built your pond correctly and in an appropriate spot, there will no doubt be a large selection of beautiful plants to choose from that will thrive in your pond.

5 Easy Bog Plants — Bog plants help break up the barrier between your pond and the rest of your yard. Learn about five easy bog plants, including angel wings, calla lilies, mint, hasta and ferns.