

Our Favorite “Right” Plants for the Right Spot

Plants For Around Water Gardens

Hinoki cypress (*Chamaecyparis obtusa*). Many interesting forms and colors in this mostly trouble-free evergreen family. ‘Filicoides’ is elegant green upright; ‘Crippsii’ is nice golden upright; ‘Nana Gracilis’ is compact dwarf; ‘Torulosa’ is dwarf with twisted branches. Sun or part shade.

Cutleaf Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*). Elegant, dissected foliage — often in red — makes these ideal specimens. Many are as broad as tall, but a few are more upright. Most also have striking fall foliage. Protect from wind to prevent leaf scorching. Sun or part shade.

Tricolored or dappled willow (*Salix integra* ‘Hakuro Nishiki’). Large rounded bush with white-green new foliage that makes plant look like it’s almost pure white in spring. Grows about 6-by-6. Best in part shade.

Elephant ears (*Colocasia*). Tender bulb that puts out thick stalks with enormous, wide leaves. Very tropical looking. Lift bulbs in fall. Plants grow 4-5’ tall. ‘Black Magic’ and ‘Illustris’ have dark leaves. Sun or part shade.

Weeping blue atlas cedar (*Cedrus atlantica pendula*). Slow-growing evergreen with steely blue needles. Every one grows in own unique shape, but branches can be trained or pruned in whatever direction wanted. Sun or part shade. Only downfall is it may not survive abnormally cold winter.

Ornamental grass. Miscanthus varieties such as ‘Morning Light’ and ‘Graziella’ have a fountain habit that’s ideal for pondside. Fountain grass (*Pennisetum*), feather reed grass (*Calamagrostis*) and red switchgrass (*Panicum*) also are good, durable choices. Sun to light shade.

About planting around water gardens...

The logical approach to landscaping around a water garden is to go with plants that naturally grow around water. In nature, these would be “marginal” or “bog” plants, or at least plants that don’t mind “wet feet.” This may or may not be a good strategy, depending on your site.

If your pond is out in the open in a hot, sunny site, you’re better off going with plants suited to those conditions. (See one of our sun-loving plant lists in that case.) But if your pond is in a cooler area or if you’re willing to keep your pondside plantings well watered in dry weather, plants on this list are good candidates.

We’ve broken suggestions down into three categories: specimens (use a few in key spots, such as a weeper behind a waterfall), perimeter plants (small to mid-sized shrubs and flowers that should make up the bulk of the planting), and creepers (short plants for pond edges that also look neat when allowed to spill over into the water).

One other tip: Be sure not to place tall plants between where you view the pond and the pond itself. You don’t want to block the gorgeous view!

Other plants to consider for around water gardens:

Specimens

American fringetree
Beautybush
Coralbark maple
Corkscrew willow
Dwarf Arctic willow
Dwarf Serbian spruce
Hardy hibiscus
Harry Lauder walking stick
Helianthus
Oakleaf hydrangea
‘Peegee’ hydrangea
Purple smoketree
Tolleson’s weeping juniper
Tree peony
Variegated dogwood
Weeping Alaska cedar
Weeping cherry
Weeping crabapple
Weeping hemlock
Weeping larch
Weeping Norway spruce
Weeping purple-leaf beech

Creepers

Ajuga
Candytuft
Creeping phlox
Creeping sedum
Helichrysum
Plumbago
Purple rock cress
Rock cress
Sweet woodruff
Thyme
Verbena
Veronica ‘Georgia Blue’

Perimeter plants

Astilbe
Azalea
Bergenia
Bleeding heart
Cimicifuga
Daphne
Dwarf rhododendron
Ferns
Filipendula
Foamflowers
Goats beard
Hakone grass
Helleborus
Hosta
Hydrangea
Joe Pye weed
Juniper
Liatris
Liriope
Nandina
Peony
Purple beautyberry
Sedge grass (*Carex*)
Siberian iris
Summersweet (*Clethra*)
Turtlehead (*Chelone*)
Virginia sweetspire