

# Water gardens: simple and serene spaces add a splash of coolness to Southern summer days

By Blair Farris

It's hot. It's humid. It's summer in the South. What better time to soak up the coolness of a water garden?

For centuries, landscape architects and designers worldwide have used water in the garden. Most mature gardens, in fact, include some form of water feature to add depth and complexity. Villa d' Este, a 17th century Italian villa in Tivoli, has hundreds of waterways and fountains that truly are an engineering feat, not to mention absolutely gorgeous.



Even the hot summer days in Rome are tempered by the tranquil cooling qualities of the terraced fountains with

more than 500 jets. Whether it is a water channel the length of the steps or a lion's head shooting streams into pools, the rising mist brings the temperature down in the garden dramatically, sometimes by as many as 10 degrees.

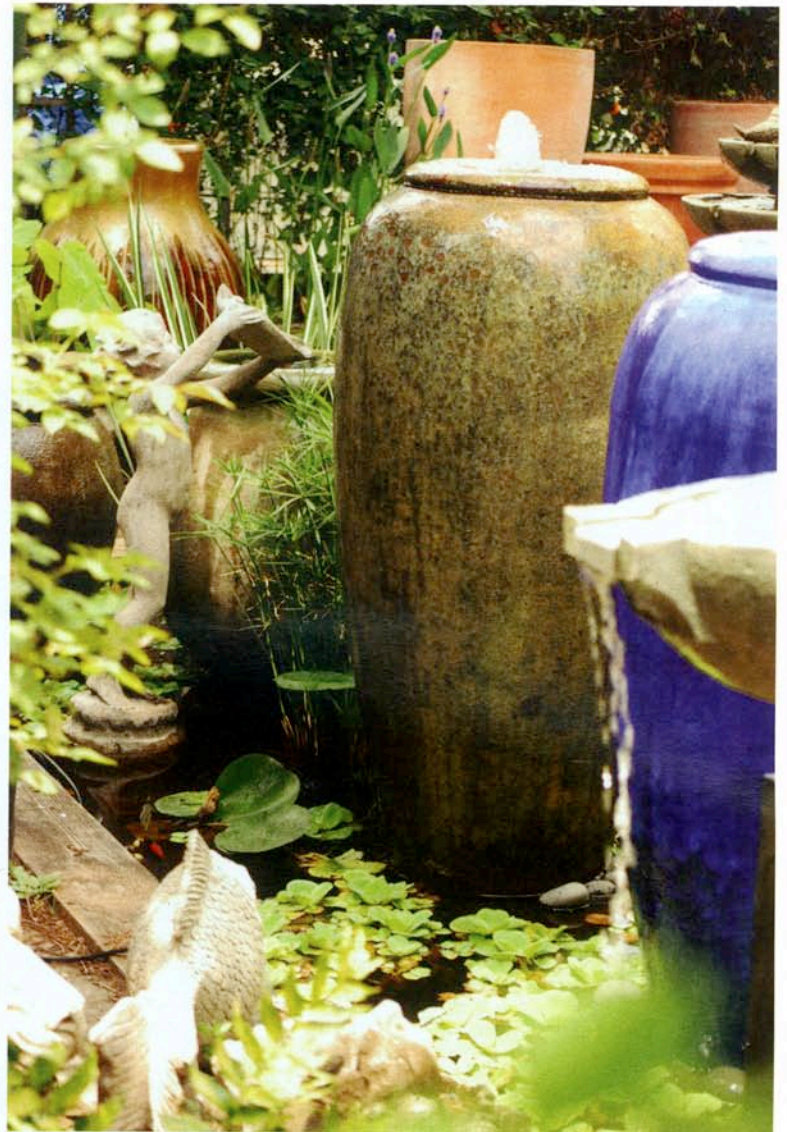
Water is also a focal point in the gardens of the Alhambra Palace, which was built in the 13th century by Arab rulers in Granada, Spain. The tranquil waters take visitors to a place of introspection and reflection. The Generalife Palace was the summer palace and country estate of the kings. The king and his court would escape the oppressive heat to enjoy the cool, summer breezes among the shaded avenues and water gardens. Small cascades, pools and fountains greet the visitor at every turn and there is the constant murmur of running water.

Though most of us in Charlotte don't live in villas, we can certainly take advantage of the tranquility of water in our gardens.

## Pools: function and form

Pools in the garden can be a source of recreation and elegant beauty. Carefully orchestrated, they can create an outdoor room of their own. I tend to like the simple shape of a rectangular pool surrounded by beautiful bluestone, limestone, brick or thoughtfully scored concrete. Setting the pool in a large, flat, lawn panel with a minimum of 18 inches for the coping is quite elegant and almost becomes a reflecting pond for the surrounding area. For tanning or lounging, well-thought-out seating is a must in the shade and sun.

On a private garden tour I recently took in Dallas, I saw a classic, square pool



Private garden

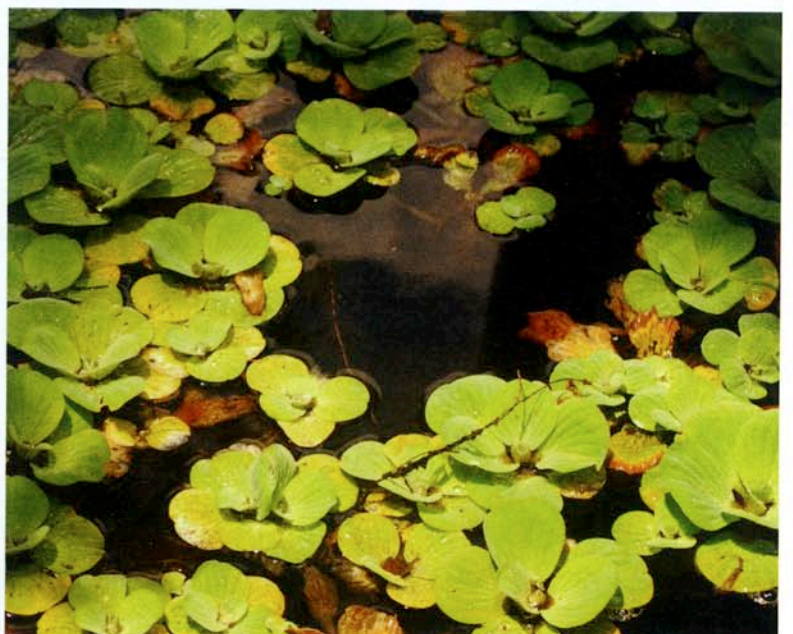
with formal parterre gardens surrounding it. The functionality was masked by the specific design of the gardens with blooming trees and shrubs, crushed-stone paths and fabulous focal points to draw the eye into the shade. Even in the Texas heat, the design of the garden and pool made it feel like an oasis.

Last year, I designed a rectangular pool set in a beautiful, Carolina garden with Cherry Trees, Red Buds and hydrangeas. The pool is surrounded by bluestone and

is finished with a dark-blue bead that sparkles in the sun. The spa is centered on the shallow end and pours into the pool, creating ripples in the water. It is the focal point of the yard for a family with five children and three grandchildren, and is certainly the only place to be found on a day like today when the temperature registered at 106 degrees. Don't forget to consider built-in pool covers, lighting and sprays.



Mounted wall fountain in a private garden



Fountains, The Royal Gardens



Private garden

## Ponds: a soothing get-away

Many people are under the impression that ponds require a tremendous amount of maintenance but they actually are quite easy. Before embarking on projects to create water features, though, you should consider the following when searching for the perfect spot for your pond. Imagine light filtering through the trees to create a space with seating that offers a place for reflection. With a pond or a fountain, it is best to have a little bit of shade because algae thrives in the sun.

Koi and goldfish do well in ponds. They need to be fed regularly during the warm months and they need a spot to hide from prying eyes. The movement of water in ponds and fountains provide oxygen, which is essential to the fish. They are dormant in the winter months and do not need to be fed.

Floating plants such as water hyacinth and water lilies help to clear the murky water in ponds. For a translucent-pink water lily, try Shady Lady or Gonnere for a stand-out, white bloom. Ostrich Ferns, Lady Ferns, hostas and Solomon's Seal also do well around ponds because they can tolerate getting their feet wet.

## Fountains: a cool spot during hot months

Whether a fountain is simple or elaborate, rest assured that the sound of falling water will draw the eye. The lull of the water creates a relaxing respite during the South's summer months. Many types of urns and containers can easily be turned into fountains.

If you are a homeowner creating a fountain, recirculating pumps will help. They can be found at Lowe's or Home Depot, but most of the fountains that

you purchase come with them. You don't need to call a plumber but you do need to have an electrical outlet nearby. Just fill the basin of the container and turn it on. The water can splash down into a disappearing container with rocks on top or into a basin filled with water. If you have a small space, there are many stunning fountains made of a lightweight resin that resembles stone and that can be mounted on a wall.

Because water features can last for years, consider one that will transcend fads and be a focal point in your garden for years to come. Serene and soothing during our hot summers in the South, water is a cooling element to add to your garden in August. ■

*For more than 16 years, Blair Farris, a Charlotte-based landscape designer, has used her education and talents to create beautiful and interesting spaces for commercial and residential properties. Visit her website at [www.blairfarrisdesigns.com](http://www.blairfarrisdesigns.com).*



Display of water lilies in a pond at The Royal Gardens



Canal at Villa d'Este in Tivoli, Italy. Photograph courtesy of Jane Fields

## Looking for a cool, peaceful place?

Visit the Daniel Stowe Botanical Gardens where the main feature is the Canal Garden, a 275-foot canal that starts and ends with major fountains. Along the way, 10 lively stoneware clay fish leap from the water.

### Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden

6500 S. New Hope Road  
Belmont NC 28012

Open seven days a week 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day and New Year's Day

704.825.4490

## Fountain treasures

My favorite place to get fountains in Charlotte is The Royal Gardens. Andrea and Larrie Sweet have an extensive collection of fountains and can turn almost any pot or urn into a fountain. They also carry water plants such as lilies. When I asked which water lily was his favorite, Larrie replied, "All of them, just like my children."

### The Royal Gardens

1733 E. 7th St.  
Charlotte NC 28204  
704.334.3764

## For the reader

Paper Skyscraper in Dilworth is a fantastic place to peruse books for water garden ideas. Tim Hamilton carries a beautiful collection of architecture and landscape architecture books that have fabulous ideas for water in the garden.

### Paper Skyscraper

330 E. Blvd.  
Charlotte NC 28207  
704.333.7130

### Two favorites:

"The Garden Source" by Andrea Jones

"1000 Visual Tips on Garden Design" by Marta Serrats

## Tip of the Month

Prevent accumulation of organic waste in the pond by removing leaves and flowers that have fallen into the water.