

Koi Joy – the pleasures of water gardening

All our columns have been directed toward the maintenance and development of your pond and water garden with the objective of developing a backyard paradise for maximum enjoyment with minimum maintenance. My husband and I started out with the emphasis on the gardening aspect that gradually morphed into Koi keeping because of the personalities of the fish. However, it took us over a decade before we would fully appreciate the virtues of maintaining a quarantine tank. Before you make the same mistake I thought I would explain the benefits of maintaining a smaller separate environment.

The most obvious use of the quarantine tank is to isolate and treat sick fish. But an equally important use is to isolate and treat newly purchased fish before introducing them into the main pond. Sick and new fish are already stressed, so every effort made to provide a stress free environment goes a long way towards the healing process. These efforts should include a method to provide hiding places for the fish, such as a clean ceramic pot turned on its side, floating a piece of styrofoam on the surface, or a water lily or any floating plant. In addition to providing shade and hiding places, as with the main water garden, the addition of aquatic plants help with the overall balance of the environment.

Fish are community creatures so always make sure there's a buddy. I haven't looked up the exact definition but I'm pretty sure it takes more than one fish to make a school. So when isolating a fish for treatment, grab a buddy fish too. At our house we have a couple of fish that live in our quarantine tank all the time to keep the tank balanced and serve as buddy fish when needed. When using your quarantine tank for new fish, plan on them being there for 6 to 12 weeks if not longer. During this time you will be treating for a variety of parasites to make sure they are not introduced into your main pond. The first treatment is always a salt treatment. Add non-iodized, non treated salt slowly till you reach 0.3%. That is 3 pounds per 100 gallons of water. Remember to buffer the water by adding baking soda. I also add a mesh bag filled with well rinsed plain non scented all clay kitty litter. It is great way to raise the hardness and to clarify the water. Then treat for parasites and bacterial activity over the next few weeks

When setting up a quarantine tank you want to have a minimum of 150 gallons. Of course if you have large fish you will need to make it bigger. Our quarantine tank is rectangular in shape 4ft by 6ft by 2 ft deep and contains 360 gallons of water. It serves us very well and, as the name implies, it is a separate and complete environment.

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