

### Koi Joy – The pleasures of water gardening

“Into each life a little rain must fall”, “You can’t have a rose without thorns”. As with each of those truths, the pleasures of water gardening and koi keeping have an abundance of predators. Living in Florida presents an exceptional challenge of handling dozens of them.

The Great Blue Heron, while a magnificent bird, has a distinct fondness for Koi. In winter, when the river and lakes become cooler and the fish move into deeper waters, your pond can become a personal buffet for these and other coastal water birds.

Mammals such as raccoons and otters will easily destroy a pond, not only eating and killing your fish, but destroying plants and liners in the process.

Snakes also are a problem for many koi keepers. We deal with a variety of snakes on the first coast, and they all swim and enjoy the taste of fish.

Thankfully, there are many lines of defense. Some koi club members put sun sails over their ponds. The theory being the sails block the view of predator birds flying high overhead and also is a deterrent to the diving birds. Another line of defense against herons is to string fishing line around the pond at a height that prevents the heron’s head and neck from reaching the water.

Many people find that blue heron and alligator decoys help. I personally have only tried the heron decoy but did not have a good experience.

If you do have predator problems put the shotgun away and seek advice from your local Koi Club. You’ll find all the members have experience with predators and are most willing to share their knowledge with you.

When designing your pond, put predator protection at the top of the features list. At a minimum your pond should be four feet deep so fish can protect themselves by going to the bottom. Raccoons, egrets and the herons like to stand in the shallow water to feed, so build you pond with straight sides so there is no standing room, and provide your fish with hiding places in the bottom of the pond.

From the personal experience category comes our personal line of defense. At our pond we have a heron problem only during the winter months. Due to this we constructed wire mesh grids that we keep on our pond all winter and anytime we leave town. We have discovered that after a few weeks of not being able to help themselves to the buffet, the herons move on to other feeding grounds and no longer stop at our pond.

Up coming events:

The First Coast Koi Club annual show is October 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Check the website for details. [www.firstcoastkoiclub.com](http://www.firstcoastkoiclub.com)

If you have a question please email me at [Dale@DWhaley.com](mailto:Dale@DWhaley.com)