

Koi-Joy the pleasures of water gardening

Dragonflies and Damselflies have begun showing up at my pond. To me this signifies the end of winter and the full launch of spring. Ooh-Rah! As they say in the Corps.

There are over 5000 species of dragonflies found all over the world. They have been around since the beginning of time and are the source for lots of folklore. The one I grew up with was that you never close your eyes around them. The result being they would sew your eyes shut. Hence the folklore names Devil's Needle, Darner, and Serpent Doctor. Another folklore yarn in the Appalachians is if you kill a dragonfly, its serpent will seek you out. My husband's third biggest fear in life is snakes, so dragonflies are a protected species at our house just in case there's a little bit of truth to this one.

Dragonflies are the sign of a healthy pond. They are especially abundant in ponds stocked with plants. So if you have a water lily pond you'll probably have dragonflies. The plants in the pond provide a perfect setting for the dragonflies to lay their eggs. The eggs hatch into nymphs who spend their lives entirely under water feeding on mosquito larva. Ooh-Rah! Toward the end of their lives they will crawl out of the water onto a reed or plant and morph into a mature dragonfly. It's sort of like the caterpillar into a butterfly with a twist.

The mature adults are especially beneficial to us in they continue in life as little mosquito eating machines. In fact several years ago a parish in Louisiana released thousands of dragonflies in lieu of sending out mosquito spraying trucks. I didn't follow up to see how successful the program was but a natural solution over a chemical one deserves an honest chance, so I applaud their effort regardless of their success.

We usually have a couple pairs of dragonflies that live at our ponds all summer. The male dragonflies are larger and more colorful than the females and are very territorial. They continually patrol their territory, defending their ground and chasing off male intruders.

Damselflies are similar to dragonflies but appear much smaller and slimmer and hold their wings collapsed over their backs while dragonflies hold their wings extended to their sides.

Hold the first weekend in June for the first coast koi clubs annual pond tour. Information about the pond tour will be posted soon on the First Coast Koi Club website, www.firstcoastkoiclub.com. If you have any questions feel free to email me at Dale@DWhaley.com.