



Spring Cleaning Tips

By Jan Schreier

The most fun (?) part of our long winters is getting the pond started again in the spring to enjoy another season. Here are a few tips to make the job better. In getting my business going, I've discovered that the right equipment can make all the difference in the world. So here is my essential equipment list for your spring cleaning job:

- Stock tank (large enough to hold your fish temporarily with a cover to keep fish from jumping out)
- Aerator or small pump (to keep water in the stock tank oxygenated)
- Two fish nets (much easier to catch fish if you use one to guide, the other to catch)
- Large pump (use the one for your waterfall, or get a large spare if waterfall pump is not big enough)
- Extra hose (at least 25 feet to help direct the water out of your pond as you drain it so the dirty water doesn't seep back into the pond or create a mudhole at the base of your pond)
- Hip waders
- Hydrogen Peroxide (1-4 quarts)
- Hand Sprayer (one that can be primed with air, used to spray the H₂O₂ on the rocks)
- Garden hose with strong sprayer attachment (I've found that expensive & noisy gas or electric power washers are unnecessary and can sometimes do damage to liners)
- Solar Salt (1 lb per 100 gallons of water – as pure as possible without additives)
- Dechlorinator (if returning fish the same day)

The next question is WHEN is the best time of year to do this? I've tried all times from an early 70 degree February thaw to late May, and have concluded that earlier is probably better than later. Some people recommend waiting until water temperatures are at least 50 degrees so the fish can handle the stress better. But, I've found that the inevitable spring algae bloom gets so bad if you wait that long, that the cleaning is ten times harder, and let's face it, whether the water temperature is 35 or 50, catching all your fish and putting them in a holding tank is stressful for both you & the fish. So my philosophy, is to use gentle handling techniques and get things started on the first nice sunny day after all the ice has gone out of the pond.

So, you have all the right equipment & have a nice sunny day to work with. Here's what I do to get the pond off to a nice start:

1. Start draining your pond using the spare pump and extra hose. The first bit of water should be pumped directly from the pond to the holding tank. This will ensure your fish will be transferred to the same temperature & quality of water from which they are accustomed. Once your stock tank is full, direct the extra pond water to other areas of your garden (great water for your other garden plants)
2. Once the pond is about 2/3 drained, it is much easier & safer to get into your pond & catch fish. Remove all the extra plants, containers, etc.. that have been stored in your pond all winter. (This is a good time to divide & repot plants if necessary). Very gently, use one fish net to hold steady in the pond, and use the other fish net to guide fish into the first one. Transfer the fish into the holding tank by letting them swim out of the fish net. Repeat as necessary until you've caught all the fish*. (*all the fish? Ha! So you think. You will find other babies hiding between rocks later).
3. Continue draining the pond. As the pond is draining, you can start hosing off the waterfalls and sides of the pond using your garden hose sprayer. Make sure the pump is at the lowest possible point in the pond, and if you want a super clean job, move any rocks you have in the bottom of the pond, so the pump is sitting in a small spot on bare liner. Continue rinsing off all

the rocks and draining the water until the water runs relatively clear. You may have to stop the pump a few times as filling is usually slower than draining.

4. Once the rocks are relatively clean, spray them directly with hydrogen peroxide (non-diluted from the bottle) just until all the algae-covered rocks are saturated. Let that sit for about 10-15 minutes. While you are waiting, do steps 5 & 6.
5. Clean off the pots with a sponge & water.
6. Rinse off all the media filters (skimmer pads, biofalls, lava rocks etc...) using the sprayer and turning them over several times.
7. Rinse off the hydrogen peroxide from the rocks with a quick spray from the hose and drain any excess water one more time.
8. Refill the pond. As you're waiting for the pond to fill, place all the plants where you want to eventually put them, assemble the filters and waterfall pumps.
9. Once the pond is full, start the waterfall pumps. Add salt in near the pump so as the salt dissolves, it will be pumped through the active flow of the water to help disperse the salt. Use 1 lb of salt per 100 gallons of water. Do NOT use iodized table salt. Use aquarium salt, solar salt or non-iodized sea salt.
10. If you are putting the fish back the same day, add dechlorinator.
11. To return your fish to the pond, it is essential that you slowly bring up the temperature and water quality of the holding tank to the new, clean pondwater. Start by taking out buckets of water from the holding tank, and replacing with the new pondwater. Replace about 10-20% at a time. Wait about 15 minutes between times and repeat as necessary to get the temperatures within 3-4 degrees, or a minimum of 4 times. Don't dump the holding tank water into the pond, rather repeat the netting process described in step 2 to get the fish back into the pond.

You're done! Now enjoy your pond! Of course, if you don't want to do all that yourself, you can always call someone (like me at Happy Ponds*) to do it for you. With all that nice clean water, remember that not only you, but also all predators can readily see your fish. Make sure your fish have adequate hiding places until all the plants have filled in. This is a good time to install a heron fence or other deterrents. Below are some guidelines for when to add other things to your pond. These are mostly based upon your pond water temperature.

Above 45-50 degrees: Plant bunches of anachris or other underwater oxygenating plants. Add seed bacteria to get the filters started. Add bags of barley straw to get them started (they take about 3 weeks to start decomposing enough to aid in algae control).

Above 50 degrees: Start feeding your fish lightly (1-2 times per week).

Above 55-60 degrees: Start acclimating any non-hardy bog plants that were wintered inside by bringing them outside on warmer days. Don't place in the pond until after the last frost date (May 15th in the twin cities). Some plants, that get gangly inside like umbrella palm, can get cut back to new shoots. Just make sure that you cut back growing foliage just above, not below water level. Add floating plants like water lettuce or water hyacinth.

Above 70 degrees: Finally! Place warm-loving plants in the pond like tropical water lilies, taro and lotus. Doing this at lower temperatures, usually puts the plants into remission, and in the long term you will get poorer growth and performance. Feed your fish at a normal summertime rate. Minimum food: none (some of us let the fish eat whatever comes into the pond) Maximum food: Up to 2-3 times per day (what they will completely consume in 5 minutes).