

Splish Splash

Story by Chris Olsen Photos by Janet Warlick, Camera Work

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING MORE REFRESHING ON A HOT SUMMER DAY THAN A ROARING WATERFALL IN THE GARDEN. YET, THE MAINTENANCE OF A WATER FEATURE CAN BE RATHER DAUNTING FOR SOME OF US, INCLUDING MYSELF! YOU COULD INSTALL A PONDLESS FEATURE, BUT THERE'S JUST SOMETHING SO SPECIAL ABOUT SPLASHING WATER FALLING INTO A POND FULL OF KOI. THE KEY IS TO BUILD A DREAM WATERFALL AND POND — DOING IT CORRECTLY FROM THE BEGINNING TO AVOID TIME-CONSUMING MAINTENANCE ISSUES LATER.

It's all about sight and sound. Not only does a waterfall add grace to a garden, but functionally, it can muffle sounds, such as annoying nearby traffic. Dual water features may be the best solution if you live on a busy road. As a matter of fact, my team at Botanica Gardens recently installed a double waterfall with dual ponds that I designed. The homeowners live on a very busy street and also have a school behind their home. Now they can enjoy their backyard as if they are relaxing deep in a beautiful, quiet forest. They can also enjoy the backyard from inside vantage points, therefore, getting more bang for their buck!

For the best sound, it's very important to have several rock levels, or steps, for water to splash against as it makes its way down to the pond below. More layers of rock equals more sound, and height is an important factor as well. The higher each level or drop, the louder the sound. If you have a flat lot, you can simply pile up several feet of topsoil, and then create your waterfall. Reuse the dirt excavated for the pond to add to the pile.

Remember, natural is always better! Use different sizes and shelf

widths of the same rock to get that natural look, as though Mother Nature herself created the waterfall. Go ahead and tuck some aquatic plants into the crevices between rocks for a more realistic look, and enhance the surroundings with lush landscaping for the finishing touch.

When you build your water feature, make sure to create a natural bio-system. A balanced bio-system supports good bacteria which will produce healthy, clear water. I recommend using the Biofalls® Aquatic Pond System, but there are other resources out there — the choice is yours. For me, though, the best kind of waterfall and pond system is Biofalls®, a pond setup that creates a healthy environment for all forms of plant life and aquatic animals. It's easy to install and very affordable. If you're a do-it-yourself type of person, thepondoutlet.com is a great resource, in addition to many other good sources and brands.

Your water feature should consist of several components. First, there is the waterfall basin itself. Basins come in several different sizes and should be chosen based upon the size of the desired waterfall and the



Here, and above, the dual falls can be seen from both angles. This impressive dual water feature makes the large yard feel more intimate, as well as drowning out any unwanted noise.



If you live on a flat lot, use the dirt excavated for the water feature to form a berm and then build a retaining wall. Colorful plantings will help naturalize your water feature and incorporate it into your overall landscape.





A little time and a little money will provide the waterfall of your dreams.
Drown out those neighbors, and take back your peaceful retreat.



↑ **Make sure you get a lot of bang for your buck! Take advantage of your view from inside as well as outside. This room's main focal point is not a TV but the waterfalls outside.**

← **The bright blue of the hydrangeas provide a fantastic contrast to the stone used for the waterfalls.**

↑ **The patio is the perfect vantage point to enjoy both the sight and sounds of the falls. That, combined with comfortable outdoor seating, can create the perfect retreat in your own backyard.**

size of the pond. The waterfall basin houses foam mats that capture organic particles that might escape the filter system below. This further helps the water stay free of floating debris and algae. The basin fills with water from the skimmer beneath it and naturally overflows into the pond below.

At pond level, you need a skimmer, which has a net bag to gather floating leaves and other matter. There should also be a layer or two of foam sheets and the pump.

The most difficult season for pond maintenance is the fall, when leaves typically sink to the bottom of the pond, and the only way to remove them is to drain the water. By using a skimmer, you can minimize the annual chore of cleaning leaves. Leaves floating on the surface of the pond will be sucked into the skimmer and right into the skimmer net. All you have to do is periodically clean out the skimmer net. How easy is that? No fuss, no work — just empty and return the bag right back into the skimmer.

Create your own “splish-splash” water feature. Do some research before you design your waterfall and pond, and definitely before you install it. A hole in the ground with a recirculating pump just won't work. A little time and a little money will provide the waterfall of your dreams. Drown out those neighbors, and take back your peaceful retreat.

Happy gardening. 🌿

Chris Olsen is the owner and landscape designer of Botanica Gardens in Little Rock. For more information on Chris go to chrisholsen.com.