

George H. Pring, “FATHER OF TROPICAL WATER LILIES”

by Joe Summers, Missouri Botanical Garden
with photos from MBG archives, Perry D.
Slocum, Joe Summers & Helen Nash

In 1906, George Pring needed to decide where he would work. His choice would both change and enrich many lives, offering our gardens beauty unmatched before.

George Harry Ethelbert Pring was born December 2, 1885, in Devonshire, England, the youngest of four children of Charles and Mahalla Pring. Charles was a successful builder in Exmouth until ‘Depression’ hit and the family moved to the London area. Young George grew up about two blocks from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Upon reaching the highest level of school at the time, about the seventh grade, George took on an apprenticeship at Kew. Both father and son figured that George would follow in his father’s business and someday end up in the building profession. Charles Pring told his son, “We can always make an architect out of you later on,” when he learned of the Kew apprenticeship.

Just shy of his 14th birthday, Pring began work at Kew each morning at 6:00. Breakfast and a lunch hour were at eight and twelve respectively. The day ended at 6:00 p.m. Cleaning pots, feeding the chickens, and packing plants for shipment were part of Pring’s early duties. As time went



George H. Pring, shown in hip-waders in one of the Missouri Botanic Garden’s lily pools, is known today as “the father of tropical water lilies.” *Photo courtesy of MBG archives.*

on, he took charge of the carnivorous plants and eventually was, also, put in charge of two of the orchid houses. Finally, some training on the actual grounds gave Pring a well-rounded, horticultural experience.



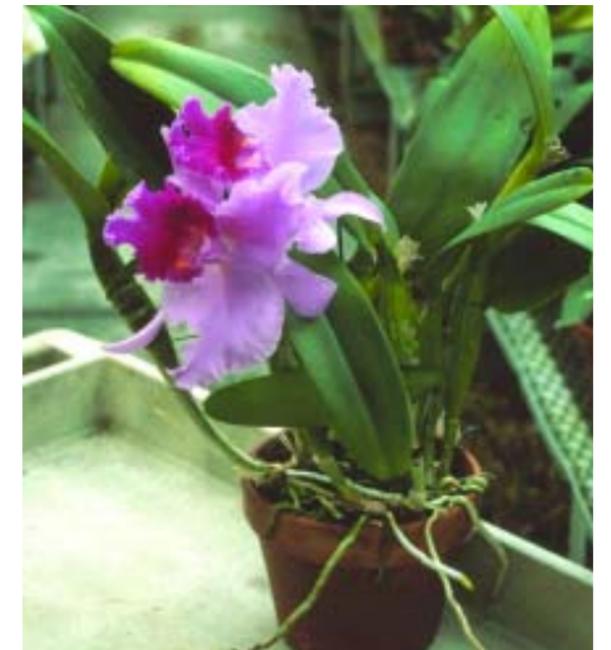
In March of 1906, George H. Pring (sitting) arrived at MBG. Pictured with him is George Edward McClure, the man who held Pring’s new job. McClure remained at MBG to help Pring settle into his new role. *Photo courtesy of MBG archives.*

The best possible education in horticulture in the early 1900’s was a two-year training program at the Queen’s School of the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew. During the evening classes, Pring began to sit in on the lectures, since he was not yet the mandatory 21-years-of-age necessary to enter the program. Pring took notes and attended the lectures for practice, hoping one day to enter the program. At one point, he turned in his lecture book, along with all the regular students, to be graded. Receiving good marks, the lecture book captured the eye of the Director. Barely 19, young George was inducted into the Kew program as the youngest student ever.

With the end of his second year, anticipating employment, Pring learned of positions at other botanical gardens. The first position was at the Botanical Gardens of Calcutta, India, and the

second was at Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis. Missouri Botanical Garden (MBG) was looking for someone to take charge of the orchids. Pring was told that he would make a better American than an Indian. Being just 20, Pring needed his parents’ permission to go to America. “You’re far too young,” his parents told him. Finally, George’s father stated, “I’m going to say to you that you decide for yourself. It’s your career. It’ll be your future.” Ten days after George H. Pring said yes, he began to work at Missouri Botanical Garden.

In the late winter of 1906, with 6 inches of snow on the ground, George Pring arrived at Missouri Botanical Garden. He would stay for 63 years. Over those years MBG changed quite a bit, and some of the fantastic growth would not have taken place were it not for George H. Pring.



In 1950 Pring registered this *Laelia cattleya* orchid that he named ‘St. Louis.’ This plant is still in the MBG collection. *Photo by Joe Summers.*



This archive photo of the lily propagating tanks in MBG's greenhouses was taken in April of 1957. Although some of the lilies are already blooming, Pring would not move them outside until the water temperature had warmed to over 70 degrees. Photo courtesy of MBG archives.

When Pring was shown the orchids at MBG, he challenged himself to work toward a Kew-style collection. Although orchids were just one of the many horticulture fields in which Pring worked at MBG, he was an orchid expert for more than 60 years and developed numerous outstanding hybrid orchids that are registered with the American Orchid Society.

Mr. Pring was the driving force in making the annual Orchid Show a success. He staged shows



While the three main water lily pools existed at MBG in 1956, the bronze sculptures were not yet in place. Since then, the upper pool has been designated the Pring Memorial Pool, the large center pool has been devoted to *Victoria* displays, and the lower pool showcases a great variety of tropical water lilies. Photo courtesy of MBG archives.

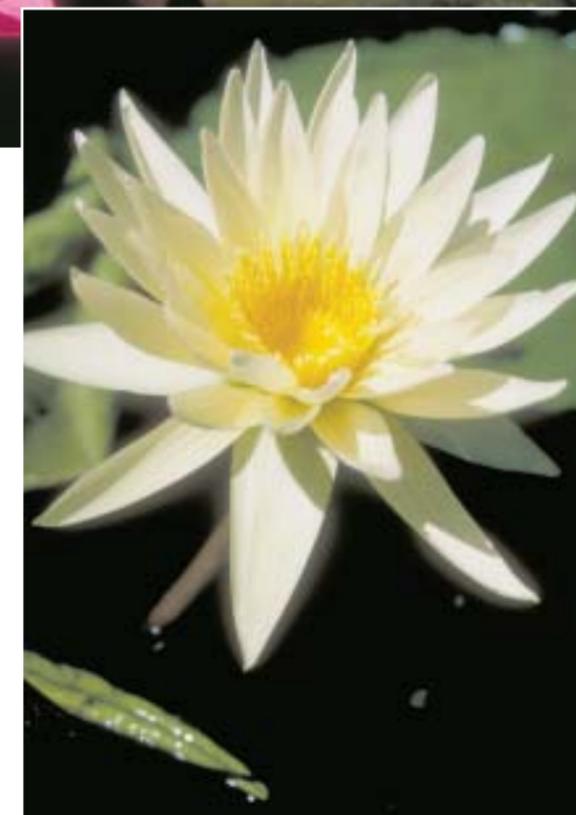
in New York City, Boston, and Washington, D.C., along with a number of other cities. These exhibits were both educational and outright beautiful. In 1954 the First World Orchid Congress was held in St. Louis with Pring as Chairman of the event. Over the years, Pring accumulated many awards and compliments as Chairman of Installation.

Pring's plant-collecting trips to Central and South America began in 1923. While on his first trip to Colombia, Pring established a tropical station on behalf of MBG in the Canal Zone. The station was used for research in orchids and tropical plants. When Pring returned from one trip that lasted six months, he arrived home with more than 5,000 plants. Over the course of his career, the MBG's orchid collection grew from the 300 plants when Pring arrived to over 50,000 plants with about 1200 varieties. The MBG orchid collection was second to none, including Kew Gardens.

In 1907, keeping a promise made to his parents, George Pring returned home for a visit 18 months after his arrival to St. Louis. On the boat trip to England, he met a young lady, Isabelle



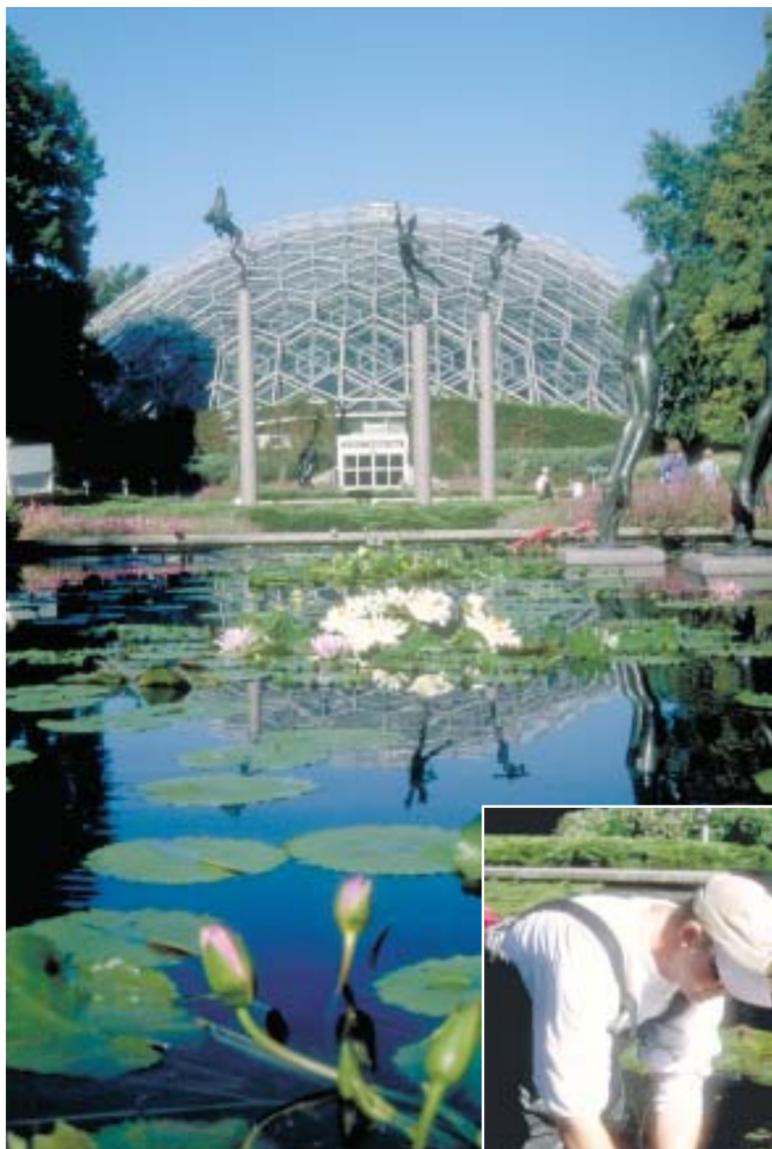
Emily Grant Hutchings. – Flowers very large, cup-shaped, pinkish-red. Leaves small, brownish green. Tower Grove Park hybrid. (1922). (night-blooming) *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.



Isabelle Pring. – Flowers similar to Mrs. George H. Pring but fuller and more rounded, fragrant; buds light green. Leaves very large, light green above, flecked reddish brown below but this fading in age. Strongly viviparous. (1942) *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.

McAdie, who was traveling with her grandmother to visit an uncle. Over the next three years, the friendship turned to romance. The couple wed in New York and returned to St. Louis to raise four children. With influences of the family home on MBG property and their father's passionate occupation, the three Pring boys became horticulturists and the Prings' daughter married a botanist.

George Pring was not alone in his dedication to Missouri Botanical Garden. His wife, Belle, as she was most commonly known, helped establish the Garden's auxiliary, which operated Tower Grove House, the home of MBG founder Henry Shaw. It was the Prings' friendships, in fact, that led to the restoration of the building. Belle initiated the first volunteer program to staff the home for public tours, and she herself filled in many



Viewed from the head of the Pring Memorial Pool, the MBG's world-famous Climatron stands beyond the round Victoria display pool and yet another tropical lily display pool.

times for no-shows over the years to keep the project alive. Belle also served many garden clubs of the area in various posts, including President of the Better Gardens Club and the Margaret Krueger Conservation Club.

Although George Pring's work with orchids and tropical plant collection alone would immortalize him in MBG history, he is perhaps most recognized for his accomplish-



Today, Jon Sweeney manages and tends the water lily collection at MBG. He and his staff worked hard to have the MBG collection, including its famous Victorias, at their peak for the 2000 IWGS post-Symposium.

grance well worth an indulgent trip into the pond. Pring set very high standards when introducing a

(opposite page) Henry Shaw. – Flowers wide-opening, spreading, fragrant, Campanula Blue, with Chrome Yellow stamens. Leaves sparsely splotched with light brown above, flushed pinkish red below. Not viviparous. (1947). *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.

ments with the tropical water lilies. If you visit a public display of water lilies or open an aquatic plant catalog, you view his work. Pring introduced improved quality, improved forms, and even new colors of tropical water lilies. For such a significant body of work, Pring is undisputed as "the father of tropical water lilies."

Pring's legacy began in 1912 when he decided to cross-pollinate some water lilies. Pring later explained two reasons for his changing field of interest from orchids to water lilies: "First, to grow lilies from seed to bloom takes only one year, but an orchid can take seven years. Hybrid lilies can thus be produced sooner. Second, there were few if any, horticulturists working with tropical lilies, providing a challenging field for experimentation."

Pring was most intrigued with day-blooming tropical lilies. Blooming high above the water's surface and their floating leaves for 4-6 successive days during the long summer hours, many of them bear a wonderful fra-





Midnight. – Flowers abundant, small, with few large petals and many smaller stamen-like petals towards the center, a deep rich purple with only a small golden center; buds dark green. Leaves smallish, dark green, sparsely flecked with reddish brown, purple beneath. Not viviparous. (1941). *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.



General Pershing.—Flowers large, pink, usually 8-10 inches in diameter, full, fragrant, persistently open, borne about a foot above water-levels; buds dark green striped purple. Leaves large, streaked reddish. Not viviparous. (1917). *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring. Photo by Perry D. Slocum

new hybrid; many of his lilies are still considered to be the best. For example, out of nearly 250 pollinations that produced thousands of seedlings, just eight plants met Pring's criteria and would be introduced. George Pring introduced only two night-blooming lilies. All of his other introductions are day-blooming lilies.

The first Gold Medal ever awarded by the National Association of Gardeners was given to Pring's introduction of the Whitaker Strain of lilies in 1920. It was stated at the time of the award, "This has opened up a new era in water lily fame." Pring's continued work with water lilies forced MBG to build bigger display pools to better showcase his creations.

Pring's next breakthrough came, after careful breeding, with the introduction of the first white hybrid tropical water lily. Exhibited for the first time at the National Flower Show in 1922, this lily



Bob Trickett. – Flower large (10-14 inches across), Campanula Blue with yellow center, similar to Mrs. Edwards Whitaker but more cup-shaped and fuller; buds green. Leaves large, orbicular, green above, red with green veins beneath, the margins undulate. Not viviparous. (1948). *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.

was awarded a Silver Medal from the Society of American Florists. It is often speculated that this lily was one of Pring's all-time favorites. He named it 'Mrs. George H. Pring' to honor his wife. Another Silver Medal was awarded to Pring the next year by the Society for 'General Pershing,' which is a large pink lily.

Pring's accomplishments have assumed legendary proportion. One true tale begins with the St. Louis newspapers being called to announce that a twelve-year project to find the "lost yellow lily" of Africa was completed. The fabled yellow lily had been described but had not been seen for many years, rumored to be 'lost' to cultivation. Finally, a seed pod arrived in St. Louis via Pring's research contacts in Africa. Pring examined the pod and its contents, only to be disappointed. "The seed pod was collected too early.



Peach Blow. – Large, full, rounded flowers with many petals and stamens, deep pink (pale Persian Lilac of Ridgway), lighter towards the center; buds green. Leaves moderately large, light green, sparsely flecked, fading in age, light green flushed red beneath. Freely viviparous. (1941). *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.

These seeds are immature." Stubbornly, Pring made an important decision. "We're gonna take every one of these seeds out and soak them.

There's always a possibility that one might be fertile."

Pring took the pod to Joe Cutak, his assistant, and the two men soaked every seed, totaling about 3,000. Within three weeks, Cutak reported, "I think there's a little seedling coming through - the yellow water lily." Pring later reported, "When the first (flower) bud appeared, he (Joe Cutak) and I couldn't wait." They opened the flower bud and were "highly delighted." It was indeed "the lost yellow lily." An unbelievable story, one seed out of about three thousand germinated... *just one seed ger-*

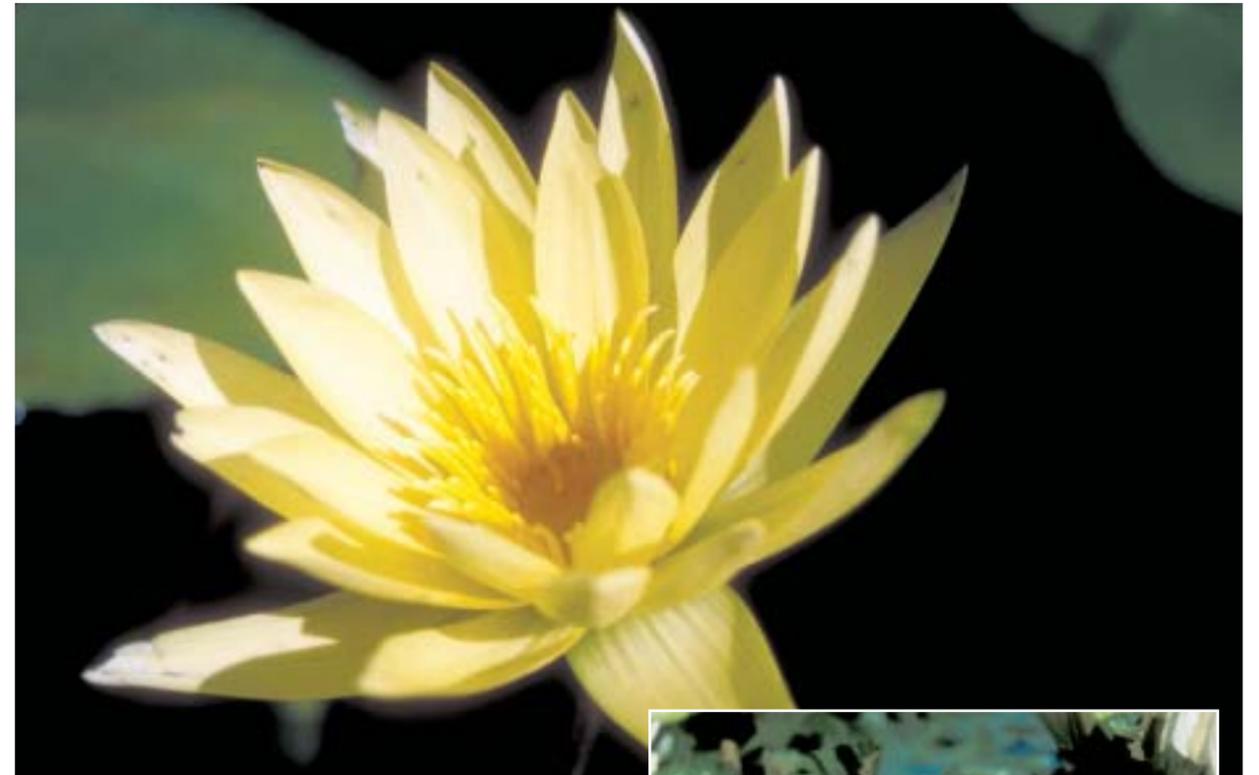


Director George T. Moore.-Flowers compact, moderately small but larger than in *N. colorata*, a deep rich purple with a golden center; buds green. Leaves smallish, dark green, occasionally flecked with purplish brown, the underside light green flushed with purple; forms excellent rosette patterns. A profuse bloomer and propagates freely from tubers. (1941). *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring. Photo by Perry D. Slocum

Mrs. George C. Hitchcock. - Flowers large, Rose Pink, stamens deep orange. Leaves copperish green flecked with green, purplish brown beneath, margins undulate. (night-blooming) (1926). *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.

minated. Pring not only proved its existence, but he would later produce some of his best lilies using "the lost yellow lily" as a parent.

The color yellow had not previously been seen in tropical lilies, making this a most notable discovery. Pring would go on to introduce several new hybrids in the yellow color range, the first being 'St. Louis,' which was the only Pring lily ever granted a U.S. patent. The 'St. Louis' lily was also awarded the National Flower Show's Medal in 1933. 'Aviator Pring' is a dark yellow lily named

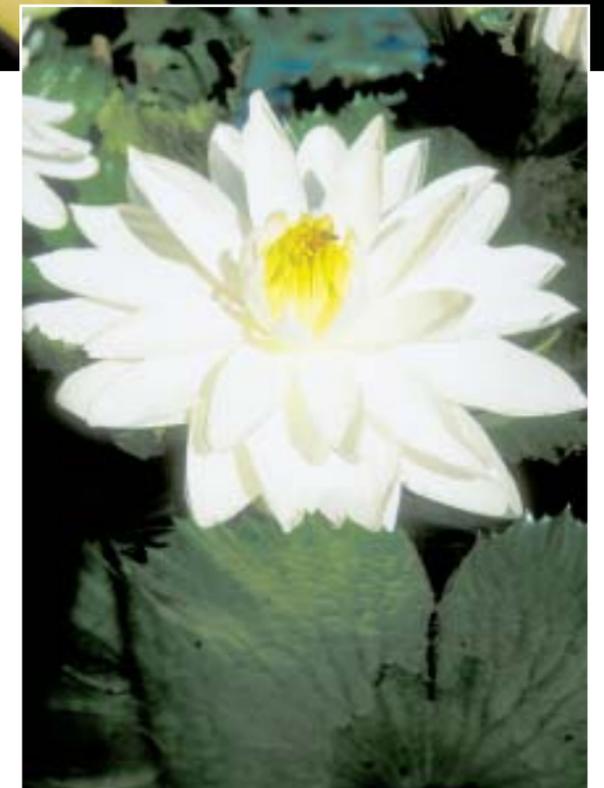


N. 'Aviator Pring.' George H. Pring 1956. Parentage: *N. sulfurea* x *N. 'St. Louis'*. Very free flowering with yellow petals, sepals, anthers, and stamens. Flower shape is large, full star, 8-10 inches across with a delightful fragrance. 25-26 petals and 4 sepals. Leaves green on top and bottom, somewhat egg-shaped, 12 x 10.5 in., spreading 6-8 feet. Nonviviparous. "One of the very best yellow tropicals for the medium and large pool. I highly recommend it." Perry D. Slocum, *Water Gardening Water Lilies and Lotus*, Perry D. Slocum & Peter Robinson with Frances Perry, Timber Press, Portland, OR 1996

to honor Pring's youngest son who was killed during a flight while he served in the military.

Besides his son and his wife, Pring also named a lily for his daughter. 'Isabelle Pring' is a wonderful white lily. 'Joanne Pring', a dark pink flower, is named for his first granddaughter. As you visit displays of tropical lilies in the future, you will spot these names and many more. Pring often would name a lily after a family member or a person significant to his work. There are also lilies named for staff of Missouri Botanical Garden such as 'Joe Cutak' and 'Director George T. Moore.'

In total, George Pring created or introduced about 40 tropical water lilies over the course of 45



Missouri. - Flowers very large (up to 14 inches), pure white, full, with many broad petals and erect stamens. Leaves large, mottled, indented on the margins. A truly outstanding night bloomer. (1932). (Night-blooming) *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.



H. C. Haarstick.—Flower very large (10-12 inches diameter), similar to Frank Trelease, but perhaps fuller and lighter-colored, exceedingly striking. Leaves very large, unusual in their copper coloration, the margins indented. Perhaps the best red water-lily. Tower Grove Park hybrid. (1922) *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring. Photo by Perry D. Slocum



Mrs. George H. Pring.—Flowers numerous, pure white except for the yellow stamens, very large (up to 13 inches), shallow, thin, fragrant. Leaves very large, faintly mottled with reddish brown, lighter green suffused with pink beneath. Adapts well to pool size, with correspondingly large or small flowers. Not viviparous. (1922). *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.

years. This feat is still unmatched. Pring's breeding efforts are still studied by current hybridizers. To his credit, Pring kept detailed records and made his breeding public. When he introduced a new plant, he published the work in great detail in *Missouri Botanical Gardens' Bulletin*. A large portion of these forty lilies have stood the test of time and are still considered the best.

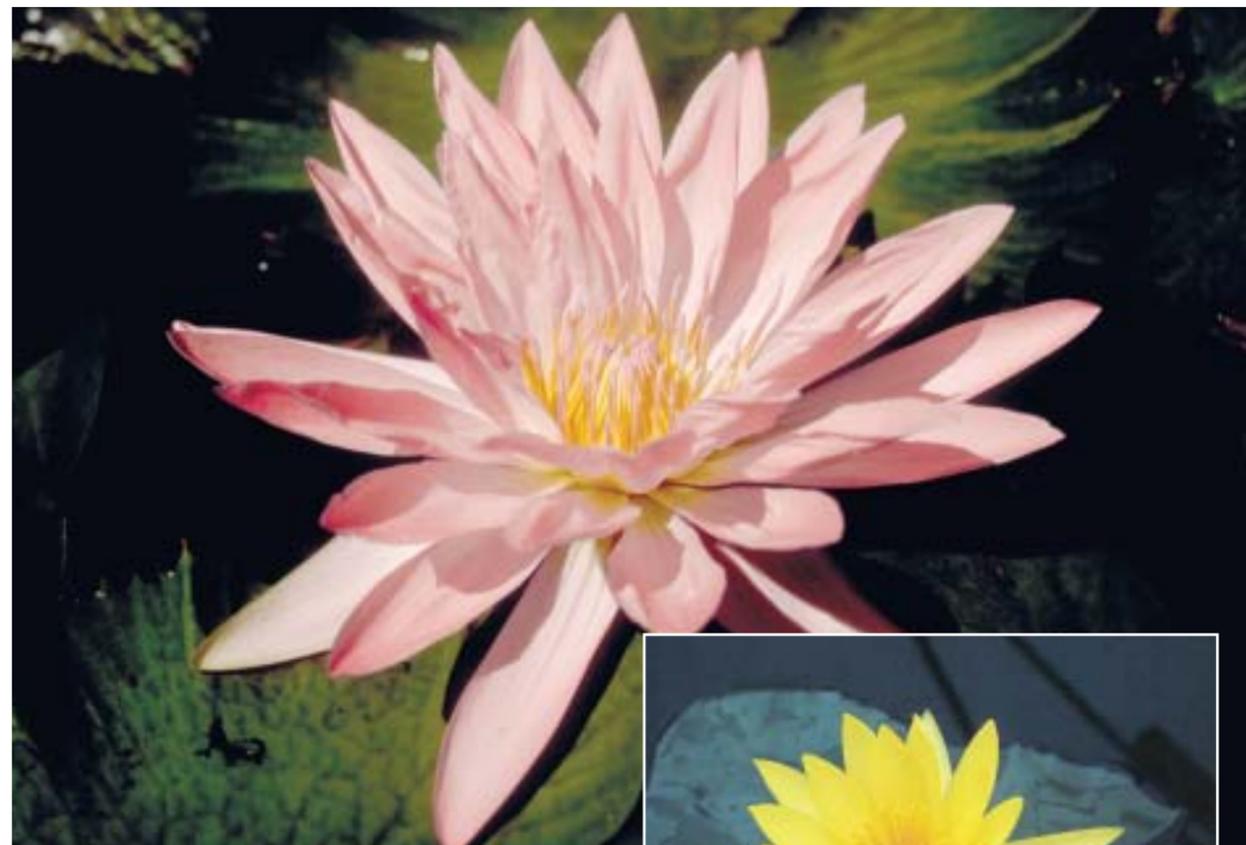
Besides introducing the first white tropical hybrid, 'Mrs. George H. Pring' and the first yellow tropical hybrid, 'St. Louis,' Pring also introduced the first hybrids of pygmy forms for the home gardeners. And last, but not least, he introduced the first white form of the gigantean

species from Australia calling it 'Albert De Lestang.' In referring to the Australian species lily, Pring once stated, "*Nymphaea gigantea* blue is the finest tropical water lily of any in cultivation, including my own hybrids."

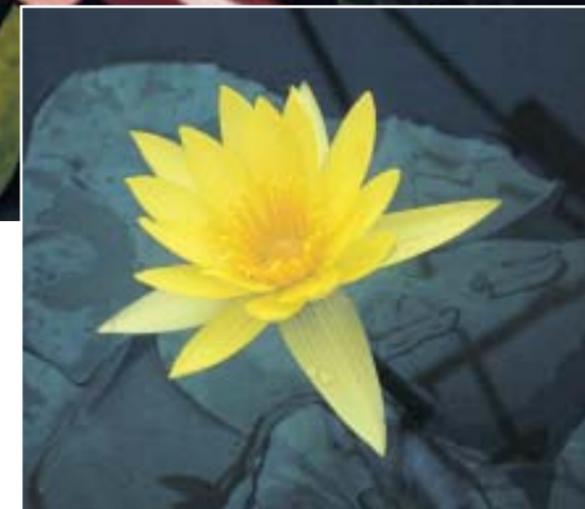
Toward the end of George Pring's career, a newspaper article shared his "three loves." The article told of Pring's work with orchids, water lilies, and his lovely

wife. It went on to say that these were the "three loves of George Pring." Well, Mrs. Pring "did not like that very well" as she was listed *third* after the orchids and lilies. This remained quite the joke for years to come. Although these may have been Pring's loves, it is not the complete picture.

Pring was the President or vice-president of a number of local plant societies. He was a popular



Pink Platter. – Flowers large, wide, flat, moderately full, the petals long and narrow, the stamens golden below, pink above; buds green. Leaves moderately large, light green predominantly flecked reddish brown, underside light green flushed red. Viviparous. (1934). *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.



N. 'St. Louis Gold'. George H. Pring 1956. Parentage: *N. sulfurea* x *N. 'African Gold'*. Free-flowering, stellate, deep yellow flowers, 5-6 inches across, with yellow-orange anthers and stamens, the anthers tipped with deep yellow, bearing a slightly sweet fragrance. 20-22 petals; 4 sepals. Oval-shaped, olive-green leaves are bronzy with small purple blotches, 8-10 inches across and spreading 4-5 feet; new leaves are light purple with prominent light green veins. Nonviviparous. "Flowers of 'St. Louis Gold' open late and close late. A magnificent lily for any size pool and an especially good choice for the small pool due to its restricted leaf spread." Perry D. Slocum, *Water Gardening Water Lilies and Lotus*, Perry D. Slocum & Peter Robinson with Frances Perry, Timber Press, Portland, OR 1996. Photo by Perry D. Slocum

lecturer, speaking on subjects from "Insect Pollination of Flowers" to "Plant Explorations in Central and South America." He became "the answer man," responding to the numerous questions that came to MBG. Pring also hosted a radio program with this same concept, answering gardeners' questions about their plants. George Pring wrote numerous articles for such publications as the *Ladies Home Journal*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Life Magazine*. He collaborated on several books, for example, *Taylor's Encyclopedia* and *Garden Pools, Water-lilies and Goldfish*. One of his later accomplishments was his consultation in the design of the magnificent lily pools at Longwood Gardens in Pennsylvania.

Missouri Botanical Garden was ever changed by George Pring's decision to work in St. Louis rather than in Calcutta. Thank goodness we'll never know what "young George would have



St. Louis. – Flowers very large, 10 inches in diameter, star-like, fuller than YELLOW STAR, pale Viridine Yellow. Leaves pea-green faintly spotted with reddish brown when young, pale below. Not viviparous. (1932). *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.



Bagdad.—Flowers broad, flat, borne close above the leaves, the many petals Wisteria Blue, the stamens golden; buds purple striped. Laves ancillium, light green marked with reddish brown splotches above, purple striped beneath. Strongly viviparous. (1941). *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring. Photo by Perry D. Slocum

George Pring made many decisions in his life that benefited many of us. He himself said, "If I had my life to do over again, I wouldn't change a thing. I'd marry the same girl, no regrets at all." We can only hope that we each can say the same of our life decisions.☺

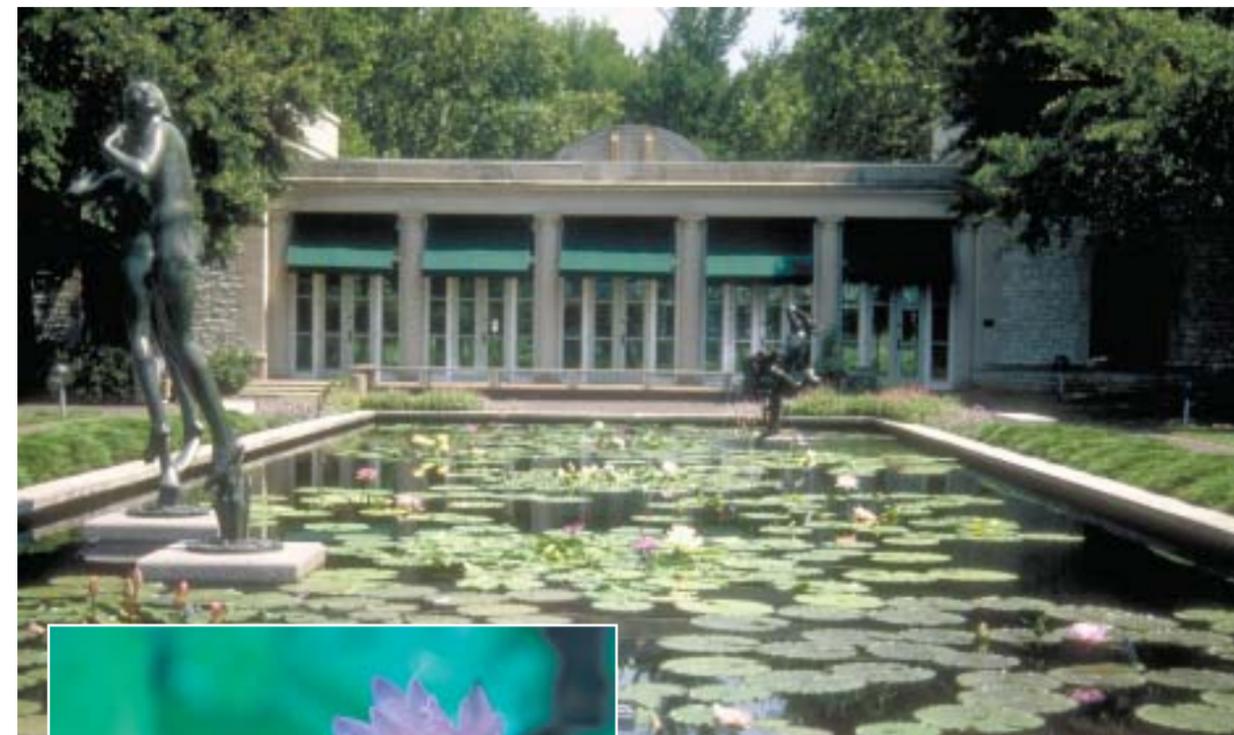
Joe Summers is a Production Greenhouse Horticulturist with Missouri Botanical Garden. Aquatic plant production is one of his duties.

accomplished in Calcutta." Missouri Botanical Garden and the world now benefit from what Pring accomplished in St. Louis. After their deaths, Missouri Botanical Garden established the "Pring Memorial Garden" to honor Mr. And Mrs. George H. Pring. Located in the Japanese Garden, this special Memorial Garden is near where the couple lived. Also, "The Pring Water Lily Pool" is dedicated to forever honor the man and his work, showcasing the beauty of only Pring's tropical water lilies therein. Two plaques near the memorial pool share his history with visitors.

Joe is also the president of the St. Louis Water Gardening Society. Much thanks to Jon Sweeney, the MBG archives, and Perry D. Slocum for their help in bringing this feature to you!



Persian Lil ac.—Flowers moderately large, pink (Ridgway calls the color Persian Lilac), full, rounded with broad petals, the golden stamens tipped pink; buds green. Leaves smallish, light green sparsely flecked brownish, red beneath. Not viviparous. (1934) *Missouri Botanical Garden Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 3, March, 1949, "Water-Lilies" by George H. Pring.



Adorned with several bronze statues, the George H. Pring Memorial Pool at MBG displays only cultivars from the MBG Pring Collection.



N. 'August Koch'. August Koch and George H. Pring 1922 An extremely free-flowering, fragrant, rich blue, cupshaped, 4.5-5.5-inch, flower with lilac-purple sepals, and inner anthers brownish orange, tipped rich blue with outer anthers lilac-purple, tipped rich blue and orange-brown inner stamens and lilac-purple outer stamens. Nearly round, unevenly serrated with some convolutions along edges, 12.5 x 12-inch leaves are olive green on top and mostly green with pinkish lobes with prominent green veins underneath, spreading 4-6 feet. Viviparous. "August Koch" is excellent for small or medium pools and will also bloom well in tub gardens. It can withstand crowding." Perry D. Slocum, *Water Gardening Water Lilies and Lotuses*, Perry D. Slocum & Peter Robinson with Frances Perry, Timber Press, Portland, OR 1996. Photo by Perry D. Slocum.



A memorial plaque is sited near the Pring Memorial Pool at MBG. Photo by Joe Summers

Water Gardens ARE FOR Everyone!

by Josh Spece

Creativity is the key to water features for the physically challenged.

Ask any water gardener what the best part of having a back yard pond is, and I bet most will say the peaceful, relaxing atmosphere it creates. The soothing music of running water, the lushness of floating lily pads with their rainbow-like flowers, and the playful movement of the fish are just what the doctor ordered after a long day at work. Not only is it beautiful to look at, but being able to get down close to the water to feel the different textures of the plants and “play” with the fish while you feed them is also a very reward-



By incorporating a thin retaining wall across one end of his pond, Josh is able to pull his wheelchair up next to the pond where he can feed his fish and work with the plants nearby.

ing part of water gardening.

For most people, getting close to the water is no problem, but for many it's just not that easy. Millions of people, both young and old, have physical limitations due to aging, injuries, or as in my case, diseases. Are we just not supposed to feel the softness of parrot's feather or let a friendly Koi nibble our fingers? NO!

I have used a wheelchair my entire life (all 20 years of it!) because I was born with a form of Muscular Dystrophy. My interest in plants



Josh's goldfish have been trained to come to his special feeding spot at the pond's retaining wall edge.

goes back as far as I can remember, and I have been fascinated by water gardens almost as long. The fascination was so strong that my mother and I opened a small nursery specializing in water gardens and hostas in 1998, and I graduated in 2000 with

an AAS in Horticulture.

My family's first water garden was a traditional in-ground pond. Like so many first-time water gardeners, we made the mistake of making it too small. The next spring, out it came, and in went a larger pond, but this one was unique.

With a little creativity, my parents, grandparents, and I came up with a plan to make the new pond handicap-accessible. The site where we put the pond had a slight slope to it. We started at the lowest point and dug back into the hill. This gave us a three-sided hole about twelve feet by sixteen feet by about two feet deep. We wanted the pond to be three feet deep, so we took out another foot in the center.

The next step was to build a retaining wall on the open side of the hole. We used pressure-treated, tongue and groove 1 x 6's with 4 x 4 posts set in the ground at each side with a 6 x 6 post in their center. These 6 x 6 post and the 4 x 4 posts on the west side of the wall were used to construct an arbor. The final step was to finish digging the plant shelves and install the liner.

I am able to pull right up to the retaining wall with my wheelchair and hand feed the fish or work with any plants that are within reach. Because the pond is built into a small hill, the wall isn't visible unless you are at that end, and the rest of the pond looks very natural, like any other in-ground pond.

If you don't have a hill on your property to build a partially raised water garden, you can

build a completely raised water garden on any flat area. Instead of just one retaining wall, you will have four. Depending on how large you want the pond, you should have a 4 x 4 or 6 x 6 post in each corner and possibly one in the center of each wall for extra support. Water is very heavy and exerts a lot of force! Landscaping timbers and railroad ties are two more wood options.

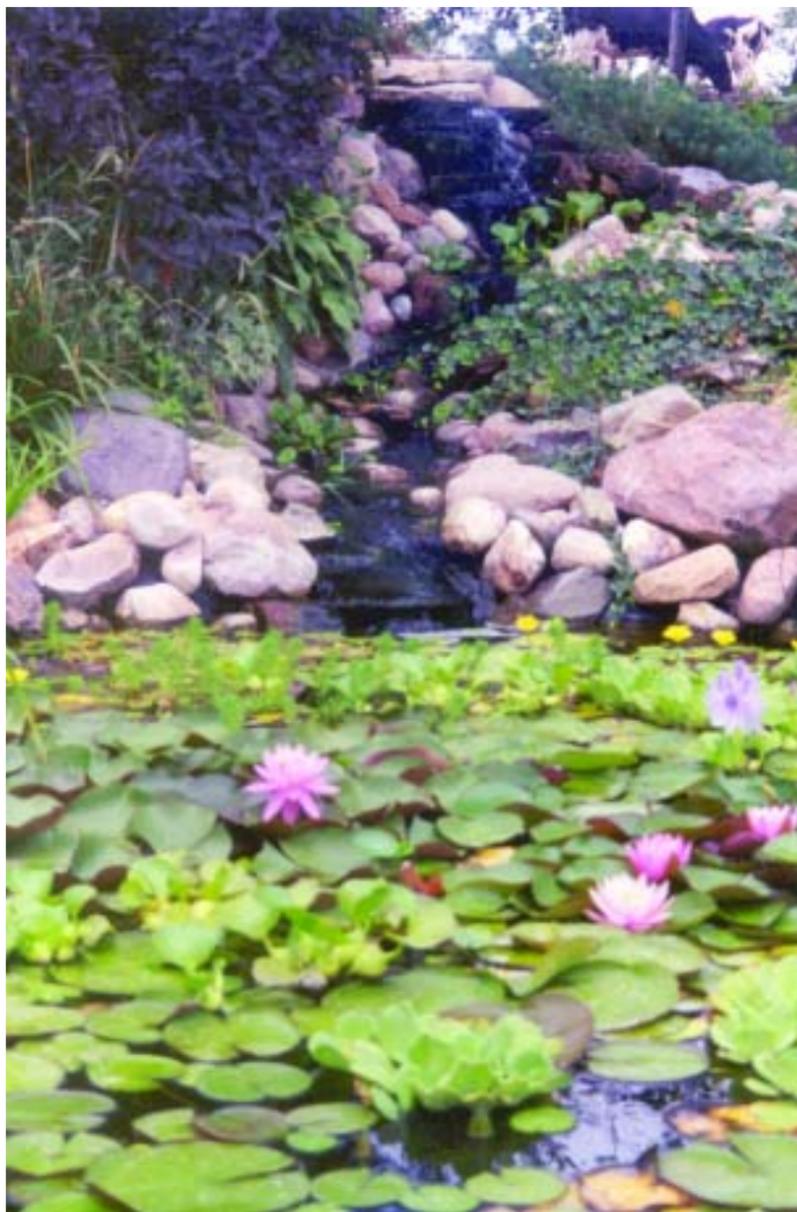
If wood doesn't fit with the rest of your landscaping, other alternatives for constructing the retaining wall exist. Though more costly, brick and retaining wall blocks also make nice, sturdy walls and have the added bonus of coming in a variety of colors.

So far, the accessible water



(inset) Originally sold as a whiskey barrel liner, Josh found this container attractive enough to stand on its own as a small aquatic garden.

(above) Josh recommends tub gardens as a way to add handicap-accessible water gardens to your landscape.



Josh's pond is chock-full of plants! A stream and waterfall system provide additional vegetable filtration and aeration, besides aesthetic beauty, to the pond.

gardens I've discussed have been pretty labor-intensive to install and would probably require the help of others. Many people who live on a small city lot or in an apartment simply don't have room for such an extensive, permanent structure. The solution? A container water garden or patio pond.

Container ponds are becoming increasingly popular with everyone, not just with the physically challenged and those short on

space. Containers allow you to add a little bit of paradise to any corner of your yard or patio. Any container will work as long as it will hold water. Some that I have used include differently sized plastic flowerpots, granite bowls and pans, Rubber Maid storage containers, and, of course, lined whiskey barrels.

The plantings are just as diverse as the containers themselves. Upright plants that I like to use in my containers include dwarf umbrella palm, dwarf cattails, water iris, corkscrew rush, and, for larger containers, taro. For variety, I also like to use a lower, spreading plant. Parrot's feather (both the common and miniature forms), water snowflake, floating heart, pennywort, and variegated water celery are great choices.

The stars of most traditional water gardens, lilies and lotuses, are certainly not out of the

question when it comes to container ponds. There are many small to dwarf growing water lilies that will work just fine. Two of my favorites are 'Little Sue' with 2-3" rosey-apricot flowers, and the tiny 'Helvola.' This cheery little lily with its purple-splotched leaves and quarter-sized yellow flowers is small enough for all but the tiniest container ponds!

The small lotus 'Momo Botan' will also live in a patio pond quite happily and the new bowl



Josh's grandparents built a semi-raised pond similar to the built at Josh's home. The pond-accessible retaining wall is partially hidden by the large boulder.

lotus varieties should work well, too, but they are a little harder to come by. Unless your container is large, the lotus will probably be about all that it will hold. A nice combination that I discovered by accident is under-planting a lotus with parrot's feather. They grow together peace-



Using strong support posts, one end of his grandparents' pond is constructed with a strong, wooden retaining wall that allows Josh to get up close and personal with the pond.

fully and the parrot's feather eventually drapes over the edge of the container. An impressive display for a patio or deck!

In all but the smallest container water gar-

dens, a fish or two will add a little movement. Use common sense when stocking a container pond – nothing very large and no more than one or two.

Water gardens are more than just beautiful to look at. They are a retreat from every day life that no one should be without. Water gardening can be enjoyed by everyone, regardless of physical ability. The possibilities are endless with a little imagination and creativity!☺

Josh Spece lives with his family on a dairy farm near Independence, Iowa. He has three ponds and has been water gardening for about ten years. He and his mother, Sue, operate a garden and gift shop, specializing in water gardens, hostas, garden art, and home-spun crafts. Josh can be reached by e-mail at jspece@sbtek.net. His web address is <http://www.pal-metto.com/jspece/> Watch for Josh's new column in future issues of P&G!



From the back of his grandparents' home, you can hardly tell the pond is a partially-raised construction.

Tiki Tour

by Linda Siler, Springfield Watergarden Society
Photos by Jim Lersch

The Springfield Watergarden Society
has established an annual tradition
– a nighttime pond tour!

The Springfield Watergarden Society has created an annual tradition. This past September 23rd, we had our 2nd annual Tiki Tour. You might ask, what is a Tiki Tour? Well, my pond-loving friends, it's an after-dark pond tour!

All ponds are quite wonderful during the

day, but imagine those same ponds after dark –with tiki torches, illuminating candles, fire burning chimineas, landscaping lights — all surrounding the ponds, lighting up waterfalls, highlighting the plants and fish... with subtle shadows and reflections cast upon the water's surface. Sound great? Well, it is!

We had been planning this event for an entire year as one of our two members-only tours. Four members volunteered to host us this year. Jim and Lyle owned the last pond on the tour, deserts and drinks to be served at their home. Think about it: trekking together with friends to see wonderful ponds and gardens, and then being rewarded with food!

Since it had been dry all summer, kind of a



The Reynolds' pond and garden were featured in P & G's November/December 2000 issue!



Bill and Jackie Reynolds have decorated their garden as much for their grandchildren's enjoyment as their own.

mini-drought, no problem with the date, *or so we thought*. Our chosen date arrived with ominous gray clouds layered across the rising sun. Turning on the television, I heard the weather man say, "A 70% chance of rain today." I grimaced at the thought of 175 club members running between raindrops...but, neither rain, nor thunder, nor lightning would postpone this event.

The members' convoy started at 7:00 p.m., with scheduled arrival at the first pond at 7:30 p.m. At 7:15 we heard the first rumble of thunder in the distance, and, of course, lightning tore through the heavy clouds. Slowly, very slowly, drop by drop, the rain began. *Splat...splat...splat*

We arrived promptly at the first pond – Bill and Jackie Reynolds. One by one we huddled under umbrellas. Then, by some stroke of luck,

it stopped raining. Bill and Jackie's pond is gorgeous with lush landscaping everywhere — annuals prevail, along with the most wonderful sumac tree you have ever seen. Don't know what to do with an old bicycle? Do what Bill and Jackie did – lean it up against the house and let flowers grow through it. Bill and Jackie's pond is only one year old, but it seems to have been there forever.

The rains held off as we loaded back into the cars to head to Pond Number Two. But...*splat...splat...splatsplatsplat*. Frantically, my windshield wipers swatted at the deluging raindrops. Undaunted, we converged on Katie, Jennie, and Sam. Some sissy members sat in their cars, while the brave ones waded through the water. And then...it stopped raining. Along came the sissies.

Kate and Jennie have a 3,000-gallon pond



Katie Knapp and Jeannie Buckmaster have used a variety of lighting treatments to make their garden enjoyable at night.

with two arms forming off the main body of water. Tables and chairs near the pond's arms invite close enjoyment of the pond's three waterfalls. The primary waterfall is in the center of the pond with two smaller falls feeding into the arm areas. The waterfalls and a 150-gallon bio-filter (stock tank) are powered by a 1200 GPH Diamond pump. Hardy water lilies, numerous marginal aquatics, and goldfish and Koi claim the five-month-old pond as home. Oh, by the way, Sam is a Boston Great Dane. He's jet black with a white muzzle – a true gentle giant who enjoys lying beside the pond and watching the fish.

With the rain abated for the night, we headed off to Dr. Dave and Helen's home. Dr. Dave is very clever. You've heard of a hog's ear and a silk purse? Well, Dr. Dave can pull it off. As you walk into their yard, you follow a narrow

walkway with three small ponds that feed one into the other on one side and Japanese deer scares on the other. Landscaping art decor adorns every nook and cranny of this narrow pond area — including handmade tufa and Laffs (Scandinavian leprechauns) watching over the ponds. A bubble bead filter allows the Koi and goldfish to swim happily among the pond plants. Dr. Dave and Helen say these ponds belong to the grandkids.

Walking further into the yard, your mouth drops to your knees. It's Hawaii in Missouri! Oh, can't be, but it's true — huge banana trees, head-high cannas, begonias by the hundreds, and a lush, lotus pond. Winding pathways lead you to surprise after surprise in this one-of-a-kind garden. Morning glories and clematis blanket the perimeter fences. Taro towers over your head. Grasses sway in the wind. And then

there is the roofed arbor. It's an old satellite dish. Dr. Dave turned the old dish into a star-bright arbor draped with small, white, twinkling lights. Nothing short of magic.

With only a sweet-smelling breeze to remind us of rain, we were off to see Pond Number Four at Jim and Lyle's home. There are no words to describe it. Walking into the back yard, a kaleidoscope of flowers surrounds you. Annuals line brick pathways that converge around the pond, the paths taking you to different areas in the garden. Fountains and flowing water abound. A huge, overflowing jar sits in the middle of a six-foot-wide concrete basin centered on an elevated, brick, open courtyard, amid ever-

green topiaries, banana trees, cannas, ornamental grasses, taro, yucca, and the most spectacular *Cedrus atlanticus* tree you have ever seen. It must be 25 feet tall. Decorative garden art takes the form of a Grecian-style bench and concrete angels watching over the flower beds.

Then there is the pond. Surrounded by banana trees, cannas, butterfly bushes, and assorted annuals, along with a huge container of green sweet potato vine at one end, the pond holds 2500 gallons with a 150-gallon bio-filter. The plants inside the pond are botanical treats, as well – both hardy and tropical lilies and large clumps of mature marginals, all nuzzled by colorful Koi and goldfish.



Dr. Dave Simmon's creative arbor, tucked amidst the tropical garden, comes alive after dark with a myriad of twinkling star-lights.



Jim Silzell's and Lyle Severson's pond area is set close to the house for enjoyment in any weather.

With the food for our eyes sating our souls, it was tummy time. Dozens of different deserts awaited. Imagine, warm hearts with friends, a soft breeze whispering through an incredible garden, and chocolate!

Splat. Oh, no, no, no! I saw lightning; I heard thunder; and I (*splat*) felt rain. 175 people ran under the porch and into the house. One intelligent person suddenly

yelled, "Hey! We're ponders. We love the water. What's the big deal?" You know, he was right. When you think about it, we had Mother Nature's lights, and the rain on the plants made them shine like diamonds. The whole garden shimmered and glowed. So as we sat, eating our deserts and drinking hot coffee, we all agreed this was a perfect evening: fine conversations, great friends,

awesome gardens, and our #1 passion, ponds. In future years, come rain or starry skies, the Springfield Watergarden's Tiki Tour will continue.☺

Linda Siler is the president of the Springfield Watergarden Society in Springfield, Missouri. She also manages O'Quinn's Orchids and Water Gardens in Springfield. She can be reached at 417-883-2399. Jim Lersch, a fellow club member, is a professional photographer. He can be reached at 417-724-8637.



Looking over Jim and Lyle's wrought-iron gate that separates an elevated, more open landscaping from the lush gardens nearer the house, lighting + gardens = sheer magic.