

# New Lives AND A New Tradition AT THE Brooklyn Botanic Garden

by Carolyn Weise

*The Brooklyn Botanic Garden  
renovates its prestigious Japanese  
Hill-and-Pond Garden!*

**O**n June 18, 2000, 123 new Japanese Koi claimed the Brooklyn Botanic Garden as their new home! This adventure began with a phone call in the fall of 1998 and culminated after much time, consideration, energy, and resources. History was made that day, and we were an integral part of it! The project was completed under the orchestration and advisement of Judith D. Zuk, President of Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Bob Hyland, Vice-president of Horticultural Operations, and Ralph Morgan, Director of the Capital Projects.

The pond in the Botanic Gardens' prestigious Japanese Hill-and-Pond Garden covers an acre within the rolling hills and manicured landscaping indicative of fine Japanese



The Japanese Pond with island, stepping stones, lantern, and crane statues is a reflective moment in the heart of Brooklyn.

gardens. There, you encounter a natural garden retreat enclosed in Japanese-style bamboo fencing, opening onto the viewing pavilion which perches above the pond directly adjacent to the place where these new Koi were introduced. Across the pond, a red Japanese Torii shrine rises from the water, symbolizing the Gateway to Heaven, reverently beckoning visitors to reflect and renew.

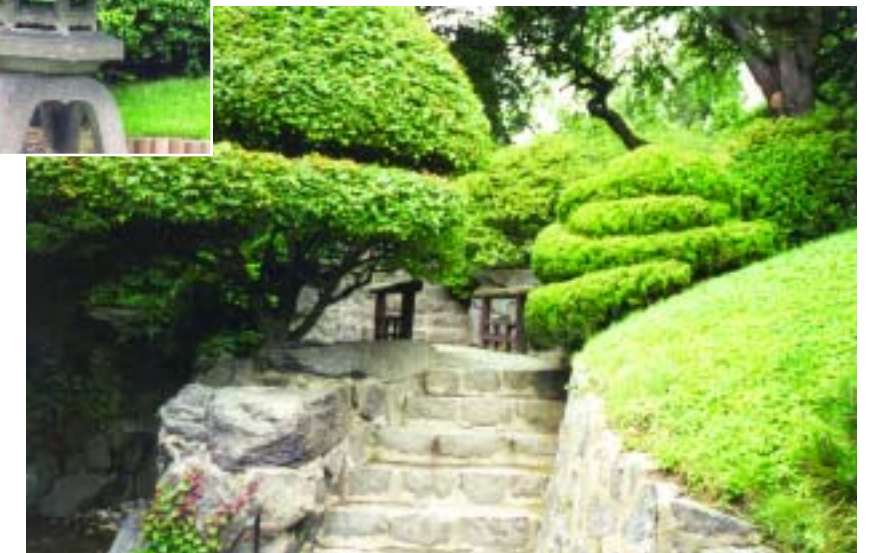
Strategically positioned around the far end of the pond, black-crowned night herons posed as silent sentinels, awaiting the grand opening of their newly reconstructed waterway. When Nature comes calling, you have done something very right! The new Koi, like the old Koi, will have to take their chances, stay alert, and harmonize with nature. And now, an amazing history brings us to this point.

Back in the fall of 1998, Bob BonGiorno of Suburban Water Gardens entered into discussions and planning with the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. The vision finally made it from the drawing board to the Japanese Garden site in June of 1999. The renovation was mind-boggling with well over one million gallons of water and an inestimable amount of fish, perhaps somewhere between 200 and 2,000, to be moved. Nobody knew their number as the fish and their ancestors had been in the pond since the Garden first opened to the public on Sunday, June 6, 1915.

In preparation for containing these Koi, Suburban crews dug and set up six 15,000-gallon 'holding ponds,' each with bio-filtration, returns, and UV lights, at their home base in Dix Hills, NY. That was 90,000 gallons with the whole works! However, not knowing how many fish to expect, Suburban was prepared to drain and pull only half the pond and then return for the



Joining Bob BonGiorno (right), owner of Suburban Water Gardens, who helped the Brooklyn Botanic Garden plan its Koi pond renovation, is Igarashi Kazuto (left) of Mushigama, Niigata, Japan, who brought 123 excellent Koi of every variety for the Garden's new pond.



(above) During the Ribbon Cutting ceremony, Taiko dancers and drummers performed on the bridge.

(inset) Standing sentry and awaiting the opening of the renovated pond is one of the Garden's black-crowned night herons.

remaining fish, if needed. In June of 1999, the Suburban crew and the Brooklyn Botanic staff began the arduous task of draining the pond and removing the Koi.

The week-long draining of the pond involved many hazards, not only to the Koi, but also to the men with the seine nets. A five-foot-deep 'canal' ran through the pond's center and several hundred turtles, including many snappers, some of which were HUGE and weighed as much as 40 pounds, could cause major problems to the wading seine crew. A turtle rescue and removal was the first order of business with Suburban constructing a 40,000-gallon turtle pond in another area of the Garden where the collected turtles could live safely without threatening the new Koi. Safety being the key word, the Koi collection was finally ready to begin in earnest.

The more than 1,000 feet of shoreline with deep sand deposits, acting like quicksand, pulled the men in thigh-deep with each laborious step.





Having raised three sons and with high chairs of grandbabies now beginning to appear, Bob BonGiorno enjoys helping the children move the new Koi into the pond.

However, by the close of the day, 435 large Koi, the smaller ones weighing 10-12 pounds, were removed with a custom-made seine net, 250 feet long and 10 feet deep. Michael Ji of SuburbanWater Gardens, having much experience with Koi in his native Korea, supervised the fifteen men needed to handle the net. The Koi were seined into a small area where they were confined for removal and transport. Amazingly, we found that when Koi are grown in the wild and attain these sizes, their ventral bones have very little tissue and become sharply serrated. This makes the tail cut like a knife. Each Koi had to be bagged singly, with around a hundred having to be re-bagged at least once during their trip to Dix Hills.

The Suburban crew brought four large oxygen tanks to add oxygen to each bag of water used for the fish-transport. Due to the continuous re-bagging process, upon arrival in Dix Hills, all four oxygen tanks were completely empty. The fish made the trip in the oxygenated bags packed in crates and loaded onto a truck. Miraculously, not one fish was lost in seining or transport.

Although the Koi had reverted

by 99% to the blue-black and brown-black Magoi, with most in the 20- to 34-inch range and with several larger ones at 23-25 pounds, the fish were not only feral and strong, they were covered with ulcers and fish lice. After their initial inspection upon arrival, they were treated and turned out in the awaiting holding ponds. The ponds were covered with a custom-made, polyethylene net to shade and cool the fish, as well as to protect them from predators or jumping out.

Bob's plan, with the approval of Brooklyn Botanic Garden, was to redistribute these fish to Koi keepers who had a lot of experience and many years as Koi hobbyists around the world. The plan is to have at least several Koi in every state in the United States, including Hawaii. Koi have already been shipped to Canada, France, and Guatemala, as well as to a number of states in the U.S.



Michael Ji supervised the fifteen-man seining operation with the huge, custom-made, 250-foot-long and ten-feet-deep seine. In one day, they rounded up 435 large Koi in the Garden's pond.

The Brooklyn Botanic Garden began the construction, a three million dollar major renovation project, at the end of June 1999. It was completed a mere 11 months later in late May, 2000. A month-long celebration of the grand reopening began May 23 with the 123 Japanese Koi being released into the new pond on June 18.

Bob BonGiorno sought the help of the noted



and highly esteemed Koi expert, Kaz Takeda of Takeda's Koi Dojo in California. It was Kaz who arranged with Igarashi Kazuto of Mushigama, Niigata, to have the 123 gorgeous Koi of every variety shipped to New York in early June. Upon their arrival at JFK Airport from Japan, Suburban picked up the Koi and quarantined them for two and a half weeks. When deemed healthy and ready, they were brought by truck to the pond site on the morning of their planned release.

In preparation for this event, several large tanks were placed at the edge of the Garden's renovated pond. Water from the pond was pumped directly into the tanks and heavy-duty filters and tank covers were set up. Later in the



(above) A stream system provides natural filtration to the Koi pond.

(inset) Carolyn Weise, vice-president of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Mid-Atlantic Koi Club releases her club's donation, a Japanese Orinji Ogon.



week, Suburban Water Gardens moved the Koi from their holding tanks in Dix Hills to the temporary tanks at the Garden's pond. Carolyn Weise, vice-president of the Metropolitan Chapter of the Mid-Atlantic Koi Club, agreed to test and monitor the water quality before adding the Koi and to be on hand during the dedication ceremonies.

The Mid-Atlantic Koi Club (MAKC) is the



most prominent and successful nonprofit organization for Koi enthusiasts, established to advance the knowledge of Koi care and enjoyment of the hobby. For some people, including Carolyn Weise, Koi keeping is much more than a hobby. The Metropolitan Chapter donated a Japanese Orinji Ogon Koi to the Garden, with Carolyn placing the sparkling, metallic-orange Koi in the pond and watching as the fish headed out to explore its new home. Of the 123 Koi released, every one was a specimen all Koi lovers would be proud to display in their ponds.

As the accompanying photo shows, on one shore alone, the line of onlookers was 3-5 deep and at least several hundred feet long, all



(above) Japanese Iris and *Liriope* are part of the renovated shoreline. While much of the pond edge is a coconut fiber "rope," this section is edged with wood.

(inset) Hundreds of visitors helped celebrate the opening of the renovated Japanese Hill-and-Pond Garden at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden in June of 2000.



Suburban Water Garden's seining crew waded thigh-deep in muck and sand to stretch the huge seine and capture the resident Koi.

crowding to see the fish, cheering, asking questions about the new fish and the ones some had known since their own childhood. There were almost as many spectators across the pond, and the newly renovated Viewing Pavilion had 100 crowded into it to see this event.

The ceremony began with symbolic drumming and dancers in traditional Japanese garb

on the hillside. These were the Taikoza performing the Taiko Drumming during the Ribbon Cutting ceremony. The first Koi, one of the original Koi taken a year before to Dix Hills, was gently lowered in a tub by Bob and let go into the place of its birth. The crowd cheered wildly as each fish was placed in the water by the 90-100 children waiting their turns to create history in the Garden.

In the future, the children of those children will visit the Garden and toss food to these majestic and beautiful fish swimming in the wild, long after many of us are gone. And, so, the legacy begins anew. The torch has been passed. ♪

*Carolyn Weise is the vice-president of the Metropolitan chapter of the Mid-Atlantic Koi Club in New York.*



Bamboo fence and rocks line the Japanese Garden's pathways.



# Florida West Coast Ponds

by Paula Biles

The Florida West Coast Koi & Water Garden Club spans a large geographic area on Florida's west coast, from Tampa Bay to Charlotte Harbor, which are about 100 miles apart. When Helen and Marilyn were in our part of the country, they wanted to visit as many Florida ponds as possible since our conditions are so unusual. In our part of the state, we have no dirt or stone, only sand; plus, the water table is often just a few feet below the surface. This makes for interesting pond design and building, to say the least. Our greatest pond expense is usually the rocks. However, we have a 10-month growing season.

## Carl & Evon Clayton

The first stop was in Sarasota at Carl & Evon Clayton's rainforest. Almost every square inch is filled with ponds, orchids, ferns, and other tropical plants. The centerpiece of the entire yard and house is the 40'-long, narrow, 5000-gallon pond designed for Carl's prized Koi. Overlooking the bayou, it is only one component in an incredible tropical jungle, meticulously and lovingly

maintained. With three water gardens inside the large screened porch, Carl has, since our visit, managed to squeeze in a few more ponds for a present total of 7.



(above) The 40-foot-long Koi pond is set directly against the screened porch so that the Koi and plants can be enjoyed anytime.

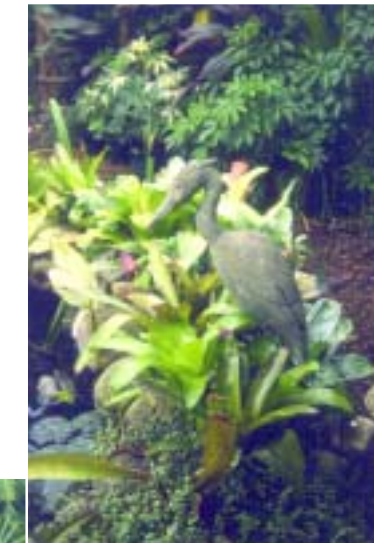
(inset top) Inside the screened Florida room, one of the Clayton's small water gardens is framed with custom-built decking around the preformed pond. Nautical rope adorning the post is also applied to the pond's edge.

(inset left) Details make the difference in the Clayton's indoor and outdoor gardens.

## Bob & Maryanne Burtwell

It only took a glimpse of Bob and Maryanne Burtwell's landscaping in Venice to realize it is the home of a Master Gardener. Different areas of the backyard

showcase labeled groups of plants, from cactus to edibles to daylilies, Bob's specialty. The entire property is purposefully wildlife friendly. Water lilies and marginals fill the pond, creating the perfect habitat for anoles and frogs, plus some friendly goldfish and Koi. The whole yard with the pond as the focal point can be enjoyed from the large glass-and-screened back porch.



(left) An angel watches over the Burtwells' pond. (right) A wooden heron statue poses in the pondside plantings.



The Burtwells sited their pond just outside their Florida room and next to a palm tree, setting the overall tone of a lush, tropical garden.



## Earl & Sylvia Warren

In spite of a ten-hour, rainy trek up and down the Florida West Coast, warm welcomes brightened our pond tour. Earl and Sylvia Warren shared parrots, pets, and hospitality, along with their new front yard pond.



(above) Water is recycled from the pond below into a stream system that feeds the waterfalls.  
(right) The Warrens' new pond features gravel and rock on its tiered bottom.



By recycling the water from a source hidden in the landscaping, the illusion of an even larger system is created.



The back of the Warren's pond is designed with a double waterfall system.



Rocks and plants camouflage the pond edge.



A pink tropical water lily, water lettuce, and the delightful white snowflake all flourish in the Strumpfs' Florida pond.



The pond is sited within its own oasis, accessed by the winding, concrete garden path.

## Charlie & Vicki Strumpf

Charlie and Vicki Strumpf had recently moved into their new home. A pond was one of their first garden projects! Because of the sandy soil, the Strumpfs' pond choice is a popular Florida option – a pre-formed pond unit.



(right) Tucked up against the house is a small, serene pond, with tropical water lilies and a Buddha statue.  
 (far right) Rich's plant combinations are obviously selected with care, such as the pink tropical against red leaves at the pond's edge.



Pottery faces set among the garden stones are magical.

### Rich Kosmacki

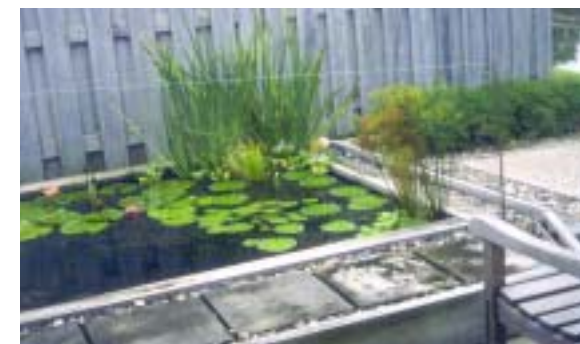
Rich Kosmacki's garden is a sensual delight, from the lush vines covering the fence to the exotic tropical combinations planted throughout and around the ponds. Handmade pottery provides unique decorative elements to the plantings.

The large backyard pond is semi-raised, providing casual seating for close-up enjoyment of the pond. The pond edge also serves to display more garden art.



### Bob & Paula Biles

Of the four ponds at Bob and Paula Biles' home in Bradenton, two are water gardens, one is a koi pond, and one is both. Ranging from 60 gallons to 800 gallons, two are pre-formed, one is a liner, and one is made from an old fiberglass mold. One round preformed pond is actually set within a wooden pathway. All of the ponds rely upon nature to assist or entirely filter the water. Netting protects the fish from numerous marauding herons, while one pond is safely hidden inside the porch.



The Biles' largest pond features a slightly raised edge and is home to both Koi and Paula's favorite water lilies.



Paula and Bob created a box enclosure for porch pond and then set up a philodendron as a vegetable filter.



A raked stone garden is set next to the largest pond overlooking the canal.



A 60-gallon pond is large enough for an aquatic plant display.



## Mike & Karen Smith

Mike and Karen Smith had 100 tons of soil brought into their backyard. A timber retaining wall separates the new elevation from the original lot. Within the new soil, the Smiths carved out a 12 x 25 foot pond, holding 2500 gallons, complete with a waterfall and evening lighting. Koi, comet goldfish, and shubunkins enjoy the exotic setting.



The Smiths created a real turtle pond with a preformed pond. Water is recycled through a stacked rock waterfall, the rocks stacked to prevent the turtles from climbing out.



(above) The large 12 x 25 foot pond is lined on the bottom with gravel and stones, the stones blending the pond construction into the surrounding ground.

(left) The Smiths take advantage of the flat rock covering their skimmer to display a turtle statue.

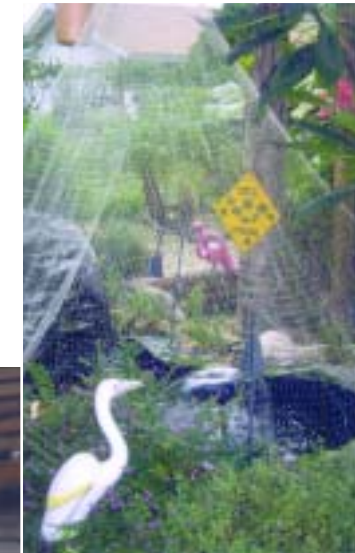


The pathway at the base of the elevated pondscape leads around the Smiths' screened-in porch. Changing the topography of their lot allowed creative indulgences with the pond.

## Chuck & Nancy Porter

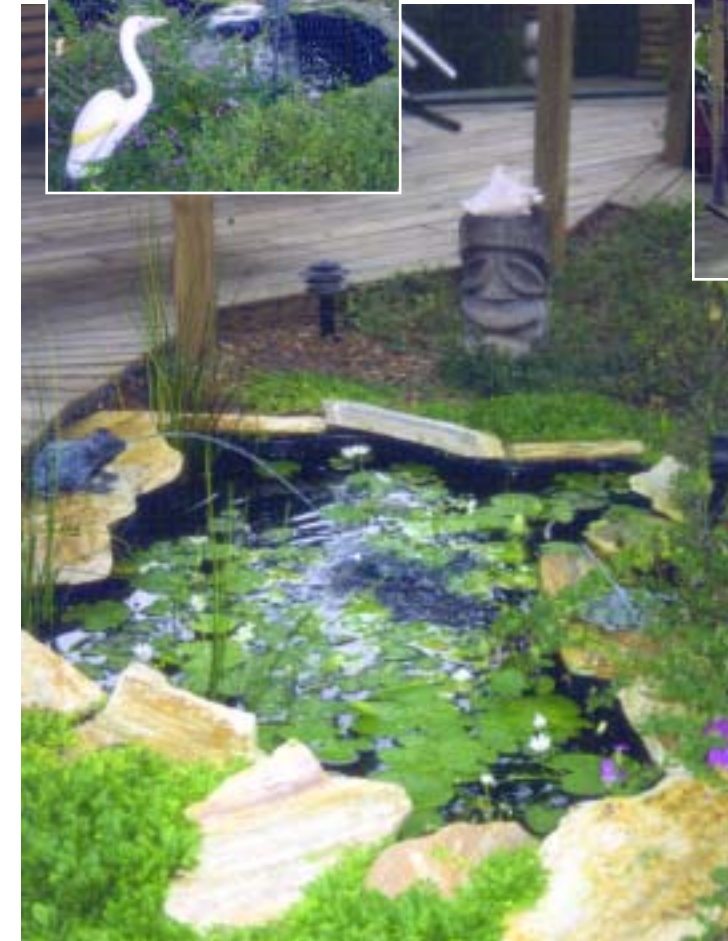
Chuck and Nancy Porter have created a people and animal-friendly environment in their backyard. Two small ponds provide homes for an assortment of fish and a pet turtle. A covered deck area offers seating and eating facilities near the swimming pool.

Tropical and seafaring memorabilia combine with lush tropical plantings.



The Porters call their covered deck area "Chuck's Bar and Grill."

*A special thanks from Pond & Garden to these eight Florida West Coast Koi & Water Garden Club members who graciously shared their ponds on such short notice! Only the pictures remind us it was a rainy day – our memories of you are pure sunshine.*



(left) Just east of the swimming pool, a small water garden indulges Nancy's love of aquatic plants.

(inset) With a three-foot-tall waterfall return built up on the back of the preformed pond, mosquito netting is draped and anchored over a small preformed pond, home of a few goldfish and a pet turtle. Nancy explained the netting is not so much to keep out predators as it is to keep the turtle from wandering off!