

# Freckles, Speckles & Splotches:

## WHEN GREEN IS NOT ENOUGH

Text and photos by Paula Biles

Japanese gardens are dominated by subtle shades of green with only an occasional splash of color. However, as Americans, we sometimes desire bolder and more colorful plants. This urge also extends to our water gardens. When green plants aren't exciting enough, we can enlarge our color palette by including other shades of the rainbow. There are countless variegated aquatics to choose from, with a wide range of color schemes. Options include green leaves with white or yellow flecks; leaves and stems with pinkish or maroon blotches; and even blackish foliage. Nowadays fish aren't the only things in the pond allowed to have markings.

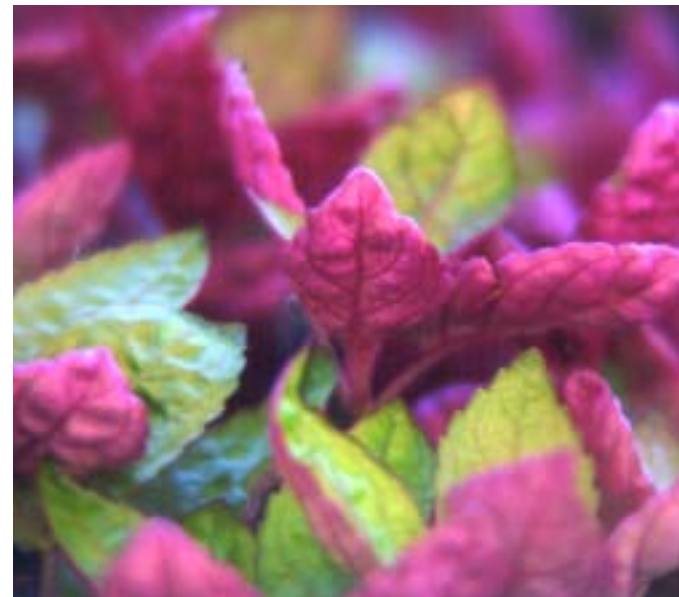
Gardeners of all types have shown a heightened interest in bright, non-green foliage. It seems that they want more pizzazz in their landscapes – something to catch the viewers' eyes and make them take notice. They've had enough of faint green variations and are branching out to more striking colors. Because of this fascination, new plant introductions frequently have variegated leaves as hybridizers and importers catch up to the demand. This trend also applies to aquatics. Almost every type of plant has



Taro varieties come with different colored leaves and stems. This easy-to-grow tropical marginal is used as a specimen plant or in mass plantings along the pond edges. 'Imperial', shown above with one of the colorful varieties of the water sweet potato, makes a spectacular container water garden.

at least one variety with speckles, stripes, or splotches of white or other colors. Retailers like variegated aquatics because they are good sellers and they are always eye-catching, even when not in bloom, which is why water gardeners like them, also. This spring and summer, check for the newest introductions when shopping for aquatics, but keep in mind that the fancy foliage varieties may be a bit more expensive.

The large majority of the non-green plants are marginals, which grow at the edges of the pond with their roots underwater or partially submerged. It's usually a good bet to select specimens with 'variegata' in the name. These plants' leaves will probably be white and green or yellow and green. For most marginals, any reference to color in the name (i.e., golden, tri-color, or rubra) usually refers to the leaves rather than the flower, since few have blossoms of any significance. Most of them keep their



Originally from Malaysia, the purple waffle plant has been adapted from the aquarium trade. It can grow partially submerged, has a spreading growth habit, and grows to 6" tall. It doesn't need lots of light and propagates easily by cuttings.



Water lily leaves can be speckled or mottled with shades of maroon or purple. They add interest to the pond even when the lilies are not blooming. If you don't have enough sun for reliable flowering, the pads can be your source of color. Tropical lily leaves offer more color variations than hardies.

color for the full growing season, which is longer than lilies and lotuses look presentable. A few have colored leaves when they first emerge, but they later turn to plain ole green. When shopping, look at both the newer and older growth.

To make the most of your new multi-hued palette, use plant groupings rather than single plants. A mass planting will make more of an impact, although you should make sure it doesn't overwhelm the rest of the pondscape. If possible, don't have one specimen stand out from the others, unless you want a show-stopper or an attention grabber. It will look better if it complements your other plants. Another landscape design tip is to repeat your color theme throughout the pondscape and, ideally, throughout your whole yard. This will help your water garden blend with the entire landscape rather than stick out like a sore thumb. One last pointer: don't overdo the use of color. If you do, its sparkling effect is lost.

Care of a variegated variety is like that of its green cousin. For example, variegated cannas have the same cultural requirements as the regular kind. Since the majority of variegated varieties are marginals, they don't need 4-6 hours direct



Sweet flag (*Acorus*) looks like an iris, but it doesn't have a bloom and its leaves smell fragrant when crushed. There are standard variegated and dwarf variegated varieties, both types doing best in shallow water. *Acorus* grows in sun and shade where it forms a dense clump in the container. It's hardy to zone 5.

sunlight as do most water lilies. However, most don't like full shade either, and they do acquire more intense coloration with several hours of sun each day.

Several water lilies offer mottled or colored foliage. The only hardy lily with heavily variegated lily pads is 'Arc-en-Ciel,' which has white and pink streaks. In the tropical lily family there are both day and night bloomers with non-green leaves. Many of the night bloomers' entire leaves are either bronze or maroon. In fact, this distinguishing characteristic is used to identify the plants when they are not in bloom. Lots of day bloomers have strong markings on the leaves, although they sometime fade a little as the pad matures. Vividly colored pads have become highly desirable in lilies as pictured in the recent import from Thailand, 'Star of Siam.' This is an area in which hybridizers and collectors are working overtime, so be sure to check the new water lily introductions.

Springtime is the perfect time to add some spice to your life... and your pond. With many color and plant options, more arrive every season. Visit your aquatic plant nursery or check the latest catalogs. Once you've re-landscaped with a multi-colored medley of plants, your neighbors will be green with envy.

### Various Variegated Varieties

Although several colorful plants float or spread their runners along the pond's surface, *Hygrophila* 'Tropical Sunset' is one of the few submerged plants with reddish colors. *Azolla* is a miniature floating plant that turns reddish in sunlight, and a few types of water snowflake bear mottling on their small, lily-like leaves. *Althernanthera* 'Ruby Runner' displays floating, reddish runners.

Numerous variegated marginals are suitable for pond edges, streambeds, or trailing down a waterfall because of their spreading growth habit. Some are dainty with small leaves (variegated *Bacopa*). Others have a lush tropical look with abundant trailing vines. The terrestrial sweet potato, *Ipomea batatas* 'Blackie,' 'Margarita,' or 'Tricolor,' also loves water and creates a spectacular sight just outside the pond, cascading over rocks or the waterfall. Red *Ludwigia* has red stems and grows like a ground cover, as does golden creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia* 'Aurea').

There are abundant choices for mid-sized, multi-colored marginals. Several have leaves with white or creamy patches (melon sword

'Marble Queen,' *Alocasia* 'Hilo Beauty,' and *Sagittaria* 'Crushed Ice'). Others have reddish or purplish stems such as red-stemmed *Thalia* and red-stemmed *Sagittaria*. Other foliage colors abound from reddish irises to deep bronze lobelia. Taros come in a range of purple colors with different stem shades and leaf patterns, some splotchy and some almost solid black.

The sedges, rushes, cattails, and reeds also come in numerous variegated species, usually with a white vertical stripe. However, zebra rush bears white horizontal bands; fireworks rush glows with green, red and pink; and candy stripe reed sweetens the color palette with pink, green, and white.

Cannas are the most imposing of the variegated marginals with the added bonus of lavish blooms all summer long. The striking foliage may be almost any color combination from green with red and yellow streaks ('Bengal Tiger') to deep purple ('Black Knight').

'Arc-en-Ciel' is the only hardy water lily with strongly colored pads, initially a bronze/maroon with white and pink streaks. The blooms are also interesting, stellate and changing from pink to white. Hardies with slightly mottled leaves are 'Chromatella,' 'Helvola' and 'Texas Dawn' which all bloom in yellow. The tropical lily family is known for cultivars and species with colorful leaves. Frequently night bloomers have bronze or maroon leaves ('Maroon Beauty' and 'Red Flare'). Numerous day bloomers have marbled leaves,

although the markings fade somewhat as the leaves age. Some of the most popular are 'Albert Greenberg' with sunset colored blossoms, 'Bagdad,' 'Charles Thomas,' 'Pamela,' and 'Leopardess' with blue blooms, and 'Evelyn Randig' with deep pink flowers. ♡

Reprinted from *KOI USA* magazine, March/April 2000 (vol. 24, issue 5). Call 888-660-2073 for subscription information. Paula Biles is vice-president of the Florida West Coast Koi & Water Garden Club.



Planting aquatic cannas is a surefire way to add bursts of color to your pond-scape. Available in a wide range of sizes, foliage hues, and bloom colors, they add a strong vertical element to the background. Their vivid hues range from a dark purple-red to a striped green and yellow.

# Weepers AND Creepers

## A SAMPLING OF DWARF AND UNUSUAL CONIFERS

by Sandra McLean Cutler

**A**re you tired of the usual garden-center-staple yews and junipers that came with your home? Does your gardenscape cry out for year-round structure? Are your property and garden too small for magnificent conifer specimens? Lament no more; the world of dwarf and unusual conifers offers a dazzling array to complicate your design decisions.



The bluest of the blues, this Rocky Mountain blue spruce 'Hoopsi' (*Picea pungens* 'Hoopsi') remains un nibbled by foraging deer in my garden, so far. A lucky find, my 'Hoopsi' had been ignored by both the grower and his customers for its lack of customary regal, pyramidal form. 'Hoopsi' needs to be staked its first few years to prevent its natural inclination as a ground cover. Whether this one was simply missed, the stake fell out, or the stake was removed too soon, I like my 'Hoopsi' as a sprawling blue beacon. This plant has personality. It virtually begs for a nearby reflecting pond.



Seeking an uncommon specimen plant for your water feature? *Pinus strobes* 'Ottawa' does it all. It sprawls, crawls, creeps, and weeps. The open, loose structure of this Eastern white pine meanders at will. Control its vigorous, annual 8-12" growth with yearly candling. I zeroed in on 'Ottawa' at my local garden center six years ago, smitten by its wayward ways. Devastated when it died the first winter, probably from over-watering and poor drainage, I ordered this one the following season. Rarely carried by garden centers and nurseries, this is one specimen to special-order.

### Candling

Most conifers, including spruce, fir, and hemlocks, respond to pruning by sending out new growth along their branches. Not so with pines (*Pinus*). New growth emerges from only the tips of pine branches. If the tip is damaged, the branch dies. The term "candle" refers to the upright new growth at pine branch tips. Also, the male pollen cone at the top of new growth in some pines glows initially an eye-catching red, further enhancing the candle illusion. In our zone 5, pines push their candles in late May when spring blossoms begin to fall. Candling is the pine's spring show, and it is also the perfect time to prune pines without damage.

Timing is important. When



(top) Jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*) is rarely used in the landscape because it has an irregular and awkward growth habit. *Pinus banksiana* 'Uncle Fogy' capitalizes on these ungainly traits as it sprawls and creeps. With our first spring showing of candles, 'Uncle Fogy's' sprawling form already showed promise.

(bottom) Late in our second autumn, notice that the year's growth of 4-6" is hardening off. Yes, even conifers have a dormant stage and need to harden off for winter.

the candle is fully extended, but before the needles emerge, it is crisp and easy to snap cleanly. Grasp the candle firmly between your thumb and forefinger and bend until it

snaps free. You may remove up to 1/2 of the candle. The clean break heals completely as the needles mature.



A dusting of snow highlights the stark beauty of the larch's winter silhouette. Buds swell in preparation for spring and lend a knobby texture and character to the branches and branchlets.

### A year-long display...

Not many plants can compare to the four-season repertoire of the Japanese weeping larch (*Larix kaempferi* 'Pendula'). As one of only a

few deciduous conifers, the larch's bare branches appear lifeless in winter. Our larch displays the usual form, the result of staking until it reaches a desired height. Imagine a Japanese weeping larch creeping over, around, and between rocks and then cascading down the bank beside a large pond.



The larch's delicate green foliage blends into an early spring collage of yellow daffodils, forsythia, and primroses.



By the time the larch's spring growth has fully emerged, daffodils are fading, tulips are blooming, and hostas are barely poking through the ground.



With the hostas now mature, the larch's annual growth is nearly complete. Notice the dangling branchlets, evidence of the larch's 12-18" yearly growth. Next spring, these branchlets will be dense with new tufted needles.



Nights turn briskly cold, leaves lose their green, and the Japanese weeping larch steals the show with its brilliant yellow foliage.



A golden blanket beneath the larch tucks it in for a winter nap.

### ...and an unusual treat

Envisioning a pond one day in this site, I planted a one-foot-tall *Juniperus rigida* 'Pendula.' (The mail-order catalog's description had stated, "Its draping form is accentuated when planted near water.") Several years later, with the 'Pendula' nearing ten feet tall, we finally built the water feature to reflect the plant's amazing form. Growing about 2 ? feet a year, the plant has grown to over 15 feet in eight years. Although not a dwarf specimen, it is unusual, interesting, *and* trainable. Because its natural habit is ground-hugging, I staked it the first few years and carefully pruned the annual masses of new growth. I say "carefully" because *rigida* refers to cactus-sharp needles.

'Pendula' is a vigorous, easy-to-grow plant that you won't see in your neighbor's yard. Even garden centers do not usually carry the plant, making a few specialty mail-order catalogs its most likely source.☛

*Sandra McLean Cutler is the author and publisher of Dwarf & Unusual Conifers Coming of Age – A Guide to Mature Garden Conifers. Visit her website at [www.bartonbradley.com](http://www.bartonbradley.com) for more examples of these special conifers. See page 92 for information on ordering the book.*



Spring growth starts long before balmy days define the season.



Crisp autumn mornings gift 'Pendula' with ethereal, dew-encased jewels.



With wintry freezing temperatures, 'Pendula' assumes a golden-bronze mantle.

# Pond Contest 2000

**From Emerald Gardens  
in Austin, TX**



Bob Burrill of Austin, TX, knew what he wanted when he started designing and building his 20' x 70' pond system – koi. Bob and Charlene use a 20,000 GPH pump and bubblebead and biofilter systems to keep the water clear and healthy for their special pets.



Janet Christian, from Cedar Park, TX, designed and installed her 6' x 8' pond last March. She uses a 4000 GPH pump and bio-filter in the waterfall. Janet enjoys using the long-handled, spring-loaded cup to feed her koi and goldfish inside the clear fish globe set within the pond. Photo by Eric Marsh



Joanna and Jim Brown's Austin pond was only two months old when Joanna took this picture. The 3'x5' preformed pond, holding 135 gallons, was installed by Austin Groundskeepers. A 300 GPH pump services the pond that family cat, Kaylee, enjoys.

**From Emerald  
Gardens in  
Austin, TX  
Bill & Kate  
Boenker**



The Boenkens selected a shade-tolerant tropical day-blooming water lily for their pond.



Bill Boenker of La Grange, Texas, designed and built his and wife Katie's pond last summer. Bill sited the 8' x 10' pond in a shady site off a paved family entertainment area with further shade ensured by the rustic privacy screen.



Water is cycled from the pond through a waterfall with a 3000 GPH pump. Bill notes they need to add water every three days to address evaporation.

**From Emerald  
Gardens in  
Austin, TX  
Dan & Diane McNabb**



In 1998, Dan and Diana McNabb decided to add a water garden to their Round Rock, Texas, yard. Dan designed and built the 5' x 20' pond and its stream. From this view, you can see part of the pond being fed by a stream originating from a waterfall in the background.

(top) Behind the waterfall, Dan incorporated a bio-filter to tend to the needs of their koi. Dan notes he cleans the filter weekly.  
(inset) An overhead shot of the McNabbs' stream reveals the path of the concrete stream and its stepping bridge.



Michael Cradlebaugh of Akron, Ohio, easily installed his 50-gallon, kidney-shaped preformed pond. Water recycles via a 700 GPH pump and provides delightful sound over a large, decorative rock next to the family's patio. Michael keeps three goldfish along with an assortment of floating aquatic plants.



Carole and David Masa of Akron already had a large body of water nearby, but it wasn't enough. They designed and built this 30' x 10', 1200-gallon pond in 1998. A wooden pathway extends across the pond for a leisurely walk to the lake beyond.

Tony and Erma Jean Lauro took advantage of the slope in their land to create a winding waterfall/stream to feed their 13' x 7' pond. They use a bio-filter filled with lava rock and a 1200 GPH pump.

**From Hoffman's  
Garden Center  
in Green, OH**



John Zell and Lisa Ellesin of Akron turned their backyard into an enclosed "paradise room." They designed and built the 19' x 18', 5,000-gallon pond and large waterfall themselves. A 3700 GPH pump keeps the water sparkling with tropical sound.

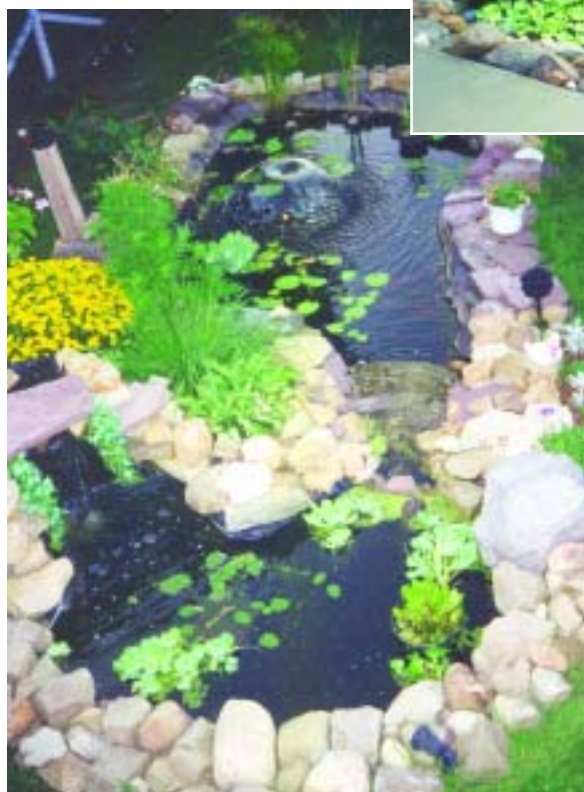


From Hoffman's Garden Center in Green, OH

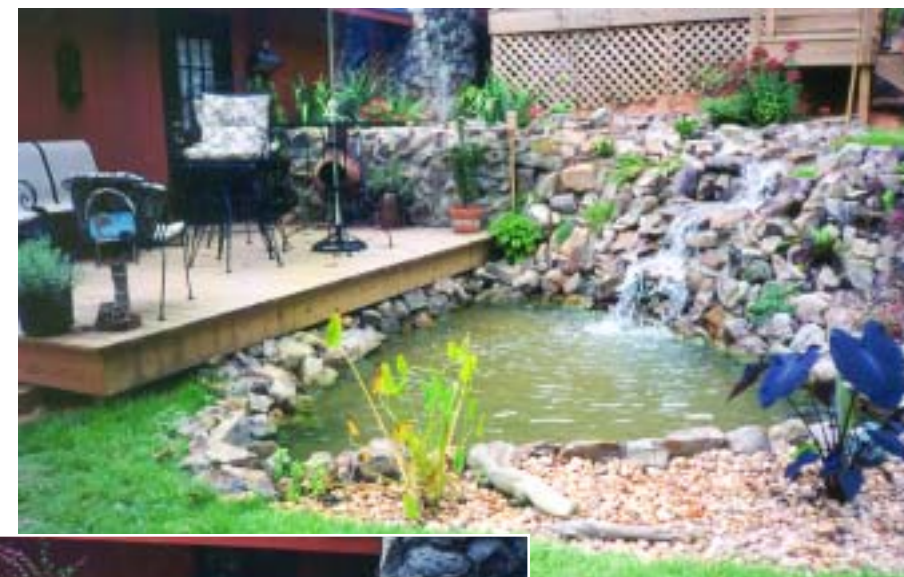
Joseph Kovach of Akron wanted his pond where he could enjoy it most often. By claiming the inside of the arms of his patio, he did just that. Joe built the 8' x 10' pond himself last summer. He uses a 1250 GPH pump to recycle the pond's 650 gallons.



Scott Laughlin's 15' x 16'-foot Cuyahoga Falls pond that he built by himself last summer certainly did away with the lawnmower. Low-maintenance patio surrounds mean more time for enjoying his koi and goldfish, too.



Some people start out small but not Timothy Jones of Akron. Tim built his 2500-gallon pond last summer. He uses two pumps and a homemade bio-fall/filter to tend his goldfish and koi.



From Aquatic Gardens in Birmingham, AL Tony & Debbie Coleman



(above) Although Debbie and Tony Coleman of Sterrett, Alabama, started their "pond-project" last April, they are still working on the vision. It's hard to believe that in one summer, they laid the rock wall, built the deck, and installed the pond and waterfall/stream!  
(left) The Birmingham area offers hills and sloped terrain. The Colemans took advantage of this by siting their waterfall return and stream on the upper level above and adjacent to their new deck.



Besides the waterfall, the sloping terrain also allows a stair-step design to the stream.