



small Ponds Big Profits

tales from the FIELD

I just got back from lunch with Ed Beaulieu, and a few customers where we were discussing a one million dollar project that was being bid on. There was talk of the politics that go into bidding the big projects, how in some cases, you're charged to bid on the project, and all that other stuff that goes along with it.

This is foreign territory for me, so I took the opportunity to ask them how much planning time they had put into the project and was surprised by their reactions. Ed answered that 10 solid hours of his time were immersed in it, and one of our customers said that it was a matter of weeks upon weeks. All of that for the *mere hope* of getting the project.

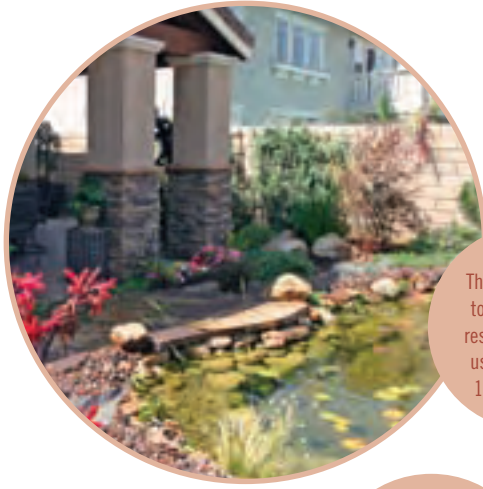
I mulled this around in my mind as I sipped my iced tea. You never really hear about the tribulations of the large project, and at that point in time, I was happy that I was a small project type of guy. Why? Because, while I was sitting at lunch listening to all of their problems, my crew was finishing up a pond project. My crew was *making* money while they merely talking about the *chance* to make money. How satisfying is that?

Don't get me wrong. I love the challenge of big projects and the end product, but small projects can be just as rewarding and fulfilling with less stress.

Brian Helfrich
Construction Services Manager



Standard Ponds At a Glance



Labor

The labor required to build a typical residential pond is usually less than 100 man-hours.

Liner

Use precut sizes of EPDM for the pond, waterfall, and stream.

Mechanical Filter

With Standard or Large Skimmers, only one is needed to properly skim the surface of a standard sized pond.



Pumps

Standard ponds consist of single waterfalls/streams designed no wider than 3 ft. Pumps in the 1500 GPH – 4500 GPH range are more than adequate to produce the proper flow rate and provide a soothing, not over-powering sound.



Standard Pond

Plumbing

Standard ponds require a single line of 1½ or 2 inch pvc flex pipe.

Biological Filter

The water volumes in a standard pond are easily filtered by a single Mini or Standard BIOFALLS® filter.



Rock

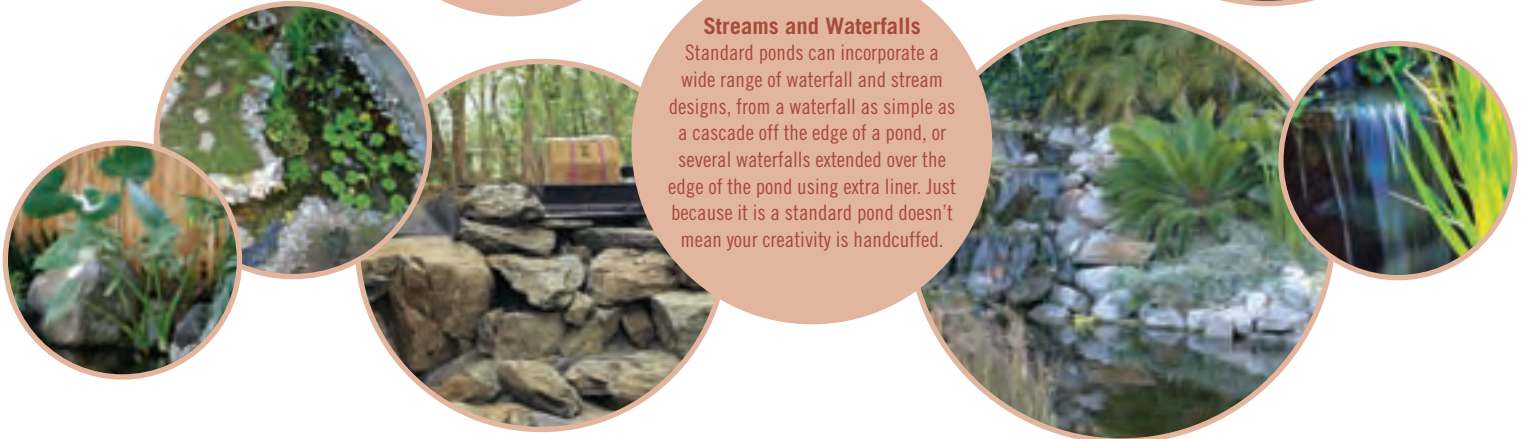
Standard ponds use stone that do not require machinery. Although they can be moved by hand, wheelbarrow, or ball cart, biceps and triceps are still needed to lift and move rock as heavy as 500 lbs.



Design

Streams and Waterfalls

Standard ponds can incorporate a wide range of waterfall and stream designs, from a waterfall as simple as a cascade off the edge of a pond, or several waterfalls extended over the edge of the pond using extra liner. Just because it is a standard pond doesn't mean your creativity is handcuffed.





It's inevitable. Once you get a number of small projects under your belt, you yearn

for that large project that will really put you on the map. Well it may be big, and it may put you on the map, but is your business ready for it?

The truth is large projects require more than just bidding against other contractors. It requires you sitting down and taking a look at your business. Why? Well, can you afford to ditch the one-day pond with freakishly amazing profit margins in exchange for a large project that is big dollar, but includes some variable beyond your control, including weather, that could cut into your productivity and ultimately your profits.

The one-day pond is a sure thing, with guaranteed profit margins. And you can line them up back-to-back and make some serious dough in a month. But what else is so great about small ponds?

percentage will be much higher with smaller projects. Smaller jobs are the bread and butter of a business because there's always someone with a backyard that needs a little pond. The closing percentage on larger projects is about 10 percent or so. And let's say that you aren't that great at closing. You have more chances and more time to sell a small project than a large one.

A Sure Thing

Small projects scream efficiency! With a big project, you're always experimenting, hoping that the idea you scratched out on a piece of paper on the way home from the site will work. Otherwise, you've put yourself behind one more day.

Less You, More Them

With smaller projects, you (the business owner) can sit and have lunch with others, learning and asking questions, while your crew works. A larger job almost always requires the head honcho to be around to make sure everything is running okay, and to make sure that large equipment is being handled properly.

Higher Closing Percentage

It almost goes without saying that your closing



Photo by T. Lam



With small projects, you can experiment with different ideas without worrying because the other parts of the projects are right on task.

Word of Mouth

Referrals are bountiful with small jobs. Once you're done with a small job, the calls start rolling in from friends, neighbors, and co-workers of the newest pond owners. The long-term relationship you have with them keeps the referrals coming. With larger jobs, not all of the homeowners' friends can afford that two-week pond that covers their whole backyard. And with commercial jobs, ownership of your creation changes hands and in the multitude of contractors working on the job, your name gets lost in the shuffle.

Short and Sweet

With smaller projects, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Simply put; a smaller job has an end in sight. You aren't working for months on end, knowing that you're not

Increasing Your Profits With Decoratives

A quick way to add on to your pond profits is with the addition of decoratives. Decorative brass or stone statuary, fountains, and spitters are a trend that will never fall away from the mainstream gardener. One of the best ways to showcase these decoratives is to put them in high-profile places, like your place of business, your home, and any display ponds you might have. If all else fails, you can always bring a few out to a customer's home and demonstrate them. Decorative pieces are hot and could really add some revenue to your pond sales!



going to get that much farther with each passing day like you do with larger jobs.

It's All About You!

You are your own boss on a small residential pond. Other than the homeowner telling you to add a few feet here or there, you are the last word on the project. With larger projects, you may have to deal with city codes and inspectors. With small residential ponds, no general contractor can stop you from laying your liner on the day you want.

The Variables

Your exposure to weather-related setbacks is amplified; your off-the-cuff guesstimate of time and materials, which works ok on small jobs, won't cut it on large projects. Hey, it's one thing to have a \$5,000 accounts receivable and quite another to have a \$25,000 receivable in limbo for 90 days as you wait for a final waiver to be signed.

Stick With the Small Projects

Our saying is, "Everyone wants a water feature, most people just don't know it... yet," not "Everyone wants a water feature, most

people just can't afford it!" Entry-level ponds provide everyone with the chance to have a pond, which means there are big bucks out there to be earned.

Would you rather install a \$3,000 project in year one for someone and clear \$1,500 to come back a year or two later and upgrade that pond for another \$7,000 to \$8,000; *or* would you rather miss the sale completely because an 11' x 16' pond wasn't in the budget? Here's the bottom line... by offering the option of a smaller dollar amount water feature, you will close more jobs. Most people who buy a smaller water feature will upgrade them. Therefore, by providing a smaller water feature option, two things will occur. One, you'll close more jobs and two, you'll increase a customer's lifetime value as a small project added onto later, to make it larger means more total dollars than a larger project alone.

Looking to go Even Smaller?

If you have a customer that wants to hear and see water but doesn't have the room for a regular size pond or the time to maintain one, then fountain rocks and water urns are a quick, easy, and profitable way to make that happen. Fountain rocks and water urns are safe for animals and children, attract wildlife, and give endless hours of relaxation.

The fountain rock is a real rock spire with water spilling out of the top from a hole made with a diamond drill bit. Water is collected in the reservoir in the bottom, recirculated, then brought up through the top.



The 20 Steps

One of the perks of sticking to small projects is the fact that it's easy to train the crew on the ways to build a pond – Aquascape's patented 20 steps. By performing the same steps over and over again, you work more efficiently and have more time to work on the creative aspects, including the waterfall.

CONSTRUCTION GUIDELINES



The water urn is the perfect alternative to a pond. Water Urns come in many shapes, from short and wide to tall and thin. A pump pushes water from the basin up to and through the urn, filling it up and slowly allowing the water to spill over the edges onto the bed of gravel, creating a soothing look and sound.

One of the decisions the contractor has to make when installing a small water feature such as a fountain rock or water urn is what is he or she going to use for the water reservoir. One of the most common ways of doing this is to dig a hole, place a pump in a bucket, and fill it with rock. This is very simple, but can be very labor intensive and not the most attractive looking landscape.



In recent years companies have been using a plastic “tub,” both rectangular and circular, not designed for water features for a basin and it is still probably the most widely used way of installing smaller water features. These worked better than the hole and bucket because it eliminated a lot of the digging and shoveling gravel, and also kept the pump open in the basin. It still posed problems for the installer though. Installers would have to use cinder blocks and a grate to lift the decorative piece off the bottom in order to attach the plumbing and because this was the only way to suspend the piece, it caused a pump access problem. Installers would have to cut apart the grate in order to access the pump when needed. The circular units would cause problems because they were not large enough for bigger decorative items such as



fountain rocks. Due to the shape and size of fountain rocks, when water pours down, it tends to have a little splash to it. The splash would end up splashing outside of the basin, causing the homeowner to have to refill and watch over the reservoir on a daily basis.

We have tested and installed all of the pre-mentioned units, and taken all of the positives and negatives into consideration when developing our new decorative basin to make it the highest quality basin out there today. Here are some of the main features that make the AquaBasin™ better than anything else!

- Octagonal shape for maximum strength when backfilling and positioning decorative pieces.
- Made from a high-density black polyethylene with a double wall construction.



- Measures 45"×45"×14". The large size allows for larger pieces to be used that have more splash and the 75 gallon capacity allows for less topping off or filling of the basin.
- 2" hole pre-drilled in the center that makes it easy to hook up plumbing.
- Two – 9"×12" pump access panels to allow multiple pumps and easy access for maintenance.



- 18" diameter designated area in the middle for piece placement with the 2" plumbing hole in the center, and dropping down 6" from the top of the unit. The 6" drop-down allows for larger and taller pieces to be installed without the worry of not enough support and stability.

With the availability and creation of the decorative basin, this now allows the contractor the ease of installing fountain rocks and water urns easily in one day, starting around \$1,500! The process is as easy as 1-2-3.

1. Pick the basin
2. Pick the piece
3. Pick the pump and install!

