10. POOLS AND WATER FEATURES

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OVERVIEW

■ The role of water in the garden
■ Pools, formal and informal
■ Water features
■ Pumps and filtration
■ Water safety

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Water will always play an important role in the garden, and the earliest garden designers recognised its decorative qualities along-side its functional qualities of irrigation and cooling.

Modern day gardens are using water in many creative and traditional ways, with designers constantly striving to achieve the most from this versatile resource.

In this module we'll be looking at the different effects water can bring to a garden, and the ways and means you can achieve them.

The first distinction we will make is that between pools and water features. Whilst a pool is always considered to be a water feature, a water feature is not always necessarily a pool and the reasons for having one or the other can be quite different. Firstly we will look at pools and then later in the module we will look at other water features.

POOLS

Pools can be split into two main categories:

- Formal
- Informal

We look at each of them next.

Formal pools

Formal pools usually have a strong geometric shape, and are used to make a statement. They can be *raised* to produce a stronger effect,

or they can be used to create a *focal point*.

Many courtyard gardens have a formal pool at the centre, which is used to reflect the shape of the surrounding walls whilst creating a focal or pivot point.
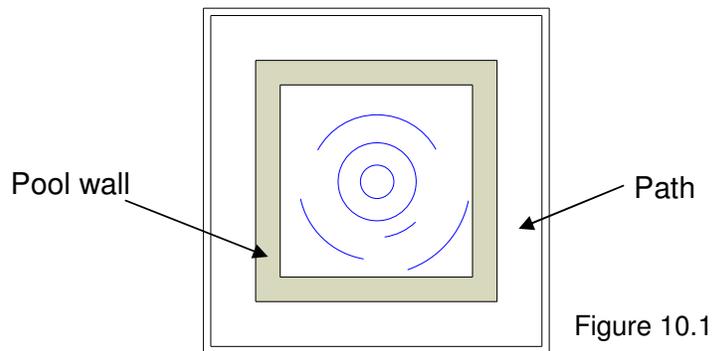
You could create a focal point without using water. A planting group or statue would serve equally as well, so why choose water over other options?

Typically we find courtyards at places of work, where windows open out on to a courtyard, and doors lead to it. And so it provides an area for taking breaks. Using water in these areas can be soothing and enchanting, both to those directly using the area, and for those lucky enough to have windows opening on to the area.

Domestic situations will have similar requirements and, like an office, may benefit from the cooling effect that water has if placed in a warm courtyard.

Some courtyards may appear too small to accommodate a pool in the middle without crowding the space and making it difficult to walk around the area. Here are a couple of ways that can help to eliminate these difficulties.

Figure 10.1 is a courtyard with a square pool in its centre. You can see how this could make the area feel restricted, especially if the pool is raised.

Pool wall   Path

Figure 10.1

In Figure 10.2, we have cut the pool's corners to create more space. But we have kept the formality, and not greatly reduced the size of pool.
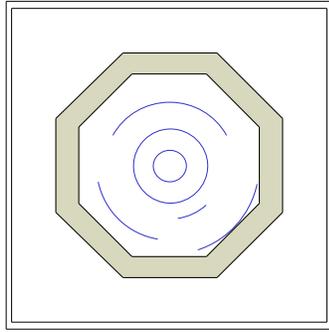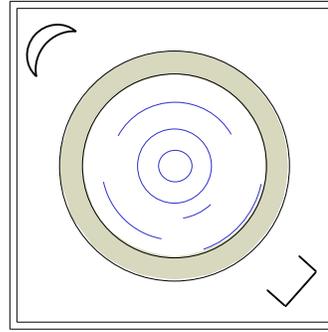
Figure 10.2   Figure 10.3

You may feel that the corners of the courtyard are now a little redundant and are never going to be properly used. If so, you could incorporate seating, planting or a statue to finish the area off, as in Figure 10.3.

You can use formal pools to lead the eye by creating long bodies of water in a geometric frame.

Classic examples of this can be seen at some of the stately homes, the one at Hampton Court being a particularly good example. This doesn't mean to say that you need have lots of space to create these features. As with most other things, you can scale it up or down to suit its surroundings. Remember that the pool need not lead up to a point, but may be sited so that it runs across an area - to give the effect of a greater width.
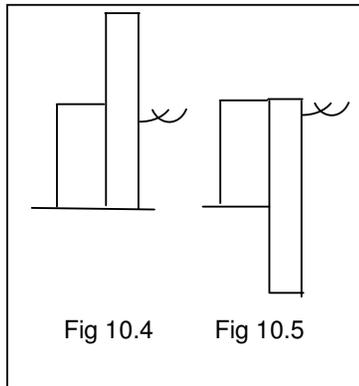
Raised or flush?

We have already mentioned that a pool can be raised or flush with the ground. Sometimes it's best to have a combination of the two.

A *raised* pool has the benefit of less excavation being needed, and you can use the surrounding wall as a convenient seat. The walls are also useful for keeping things from falling in; most importantly children and animals but also toys and leaves.

The height of the wall is crucial if it is to act as a seat but the depth of water may need to be different to cater for the intended use. Fish need at least 600mm of depth in which to live, especially if the pool is entirely raised. This is because the fluctuation in temperature will be greater than one which is sunk into the ground. This may be considered too high for the seat to be comfortable, and if so you have two options.

Firstly you can set the seat below the top of the wall (Figure 10.4). This will involve more construction and usually result in a larger surround.

Fig 10.4   Fig 10.5

A simpler solution and one, which is more beneficial to the environment inside the pool, is to dig a hole for the pool to sink into to allow for the additional depth required (Figure 10.5). The water below ground will be slower to change temperature during the day, and will be a stable environment for the fish to over-winter (to spend the winter in the pool).

Bear in mind when creating seating on the edge of a pool that this isn't the best vantage point from which to view the pool. The person will have their back to the pool or at best, be side on; and this position won't be comfortable for any length of time.

If a client wants to sit and watch the pool rather than just spend five minutes there with a cup of coffee, you should include a seating area that faces the pool.

EXERCISE 10.1

Why might you choose to raise a pool rather than leave it at ground level?

Informal pools

Informal pools blend into the landscape. Like formal pools, they can be used to attract attention and draw the eye, but tend to be subtler. The edges are usually less well defined and the shape is random.

You will often see planting seamlessly drifting into the pool forming small bays and inlets. These will appear to be absolutely natural, but are easily created with some cunning design.
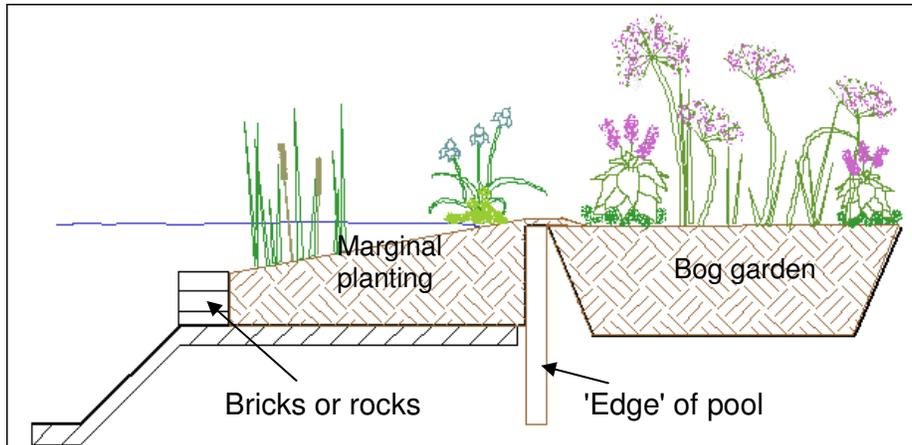
Figure 10.4

Figure 10.4 shows how you can arrange a single liner that allows a bog garden and marginal planting to get right into the pool without the soil becoming hopelessly mixed with the water.

The same effect can be achieved to a lesser extent by standing planted pots on shallow shelves around the edges of the pool and planting right up to the outside edges. As the plants mature they will disguise all traces of the pots and the edges of the pool.

When designing an informal pool it's easy to get carried away with the shape. Although butyl is flexible, a poor design can waste much liner or you may not be able to construct the pool without welding the liner.

Sometimes this can't be avoided, but generally a simple shaped pool can be embellished with planting both on the inside and the outside to give the impression that the water margins end in places other than they really do.

One such feature is to construct a dry riverbed or wadi, which can link one pool to another, or a pool to another feature. The river bed need not have a liner in at all, as it is never going to have to retain water. All you need is some stone and rocks for the bed and some planting along its banks to give the illusion of it being an extension of the water feature.

Some of these can be so convincing that they can be used entirely by themselves without the need for water at all!

You can also make a pool look larger than it actually is by adding a shore. This extension can be sand, gravel or larger rocks.

WATER FEATURES

The ponds we've been discussing are, of course, a water feature. But in this section we will be looking at other ways of introducing water into the garden - either in combination with a pool or without the use of a pool altogether.

Strictly speaking, a pool is just a still body of water, which can be great for reflections and keeping water lilies, which thrive in the calmness. If movement is what you are looking for, or perhaps some sound of water moving over rocks, you'll need some kind of water feature.

Some examples that spring to mind are the babbling brook the crashing stream and the oak barrel. There's also the water pump, the simple tinkling fountain and the ubiquitous small boy peeing into the pool.

More modern day examples have seen the popularity of things like the millstone, drilled boulders, tiered copper waterfalls, and leaping and foaming jets of water.

Whatever your taste, from the classical to the comic, there's something out there for everyone; and water provides a great opportunity awaits to personalise the garden and have some fun.

All water features work on the same principle, that of recycling a body of water from a reservoir through the feature, and then back to the reservoir. An example of this can be seen in the module on Maintenance.

As we have seen, the water can be returned to the pool in many ways, and each provides its own special effect.

THAT'S IT!

This is where our extract ends. To learn more about water features, and for answers to the self-assessment questions, you'll have to buy the course!

Below is the Assignment for this module. Does it look a bit hard to you? If so, remember that you've only seen a short extract from this module.

When you're on the course, you'll be amazed how quickly you learn. Soon you'll be designing water features and the rest of the garden like a pro!

Our assignments resemble the real world. So when you set up your garden design or landscape design practice, you won't meet any surprises.

And, as you'll see from this extract, we've written the course in a friendly and simple-to-follow way. It makes learning so much easier. You can't find a better course than this.

ASSIGNMENT

Peter and Helen Woods are aged 65 and 60 respectively. He has difficulty walking, and on Tuesdays and Wednesdays they look after their two grandchildren aged four and six.

They have a suburban garden, which is 30m (100ft) long and 15m (50ft) wide.

1. Design a water feature for the Woods. They want a water feature they can sit by and enjoy a drink in the evening.

2. Draw the water feature, and label its main parts. Include the pump and piping, and include a cross-sectional drawing if appropriate

3. List six points that you considered when planning the feature.

When you have completed this assignment, send or email it to your tutor for marking.

When you're ready to return to the web page, click your **Back** button.