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Creating a Portable Fountain for your Deck or Patio

Water features such as ponds, fountains and tabletop bubblers in small containers have become very popular during the past year. The soothing sounds of water trickling over rocks and the splashing from the spray of a fountain have been an integral part of Asian and European gardens for generations. These water features provide a tranquil oasis in a hectic and stressful environment, hence their popularity in offices, lobbies and home interiors. The repetitive sound of water splashing is also a good way to block out traffic noise, loud neighbors (and even San Carlos Airport!). Unfortunately the commercially available fountains are almost exclusively made of concrete or stone and their weight rules out their use on most decks. Metal fountains may be lighter, but are usually exorbitantly expensive. If you want a pond for fish, you are limited to digging a hole in your yard in which to install the liner. The following suggestions are two ideas for creating a lightweight fountain or a pond, both of which are portable.

The biggest obstacle to setting up a lightweight water feature is finding an appropriate container. There are some broad, shallow metal and ceramic fountains available through specialty garden stores, but you can expect to pay between \$300 and \$800 for these. Instead, check out your nursery supply store for oak barrels, fiberglass or large plastic planters. If there is a hole in the bottom of the container, you can seal it with epoxy or silicone bathroom sealer to make it watertight. The container should be at least 16 inches wide at the top. The wider the container the more interesting the water feature will be because you can add a fountain sprayhead or create a small waterfall. If the container is not very broad at the top, you can still use a bubbler. This will not produce much sound, but the motion of the water will be noticeable once you add floating plants. The heavy-duty plastic watering containers (troughs) for agricultural use watering livestock (which are sold at feed supply stores) make excellent above ground fish ponds. The sides of the container can be camouflaged with potted plants arranged around it. Slate, flagstone or tile set on the rim will create the illusion of a rock-bordered pond.

Select a pump based on the effect you want to produce. Garden submersible pumps are rated by the amount of water they will move up one foot in an hour. A pump that is rated 30 gallons per hour (GPH) is adequate for a small bubbler; use 80-120GPH for a waterfall and 190GPH for a fountain sprayhead. Ironically, the problem one has is usually too much, rather than too little, flow. Finding a pump with an adjustable output, such as the Beckett or the Pondmaster, will let you fine tune the diameter of the spray on the fountain so that it doesn't fall outside the container and drain it dry (and soak your deck) in a



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matter of hours. You will need to top up the fountain on hot or windy days if you run the pump continuously. The electrical supply should have a ground fault interrupter (GFI) to prevent the pump's burning up or shorting out should it become clogged.

To set up your fountain you will need:

1. A submersible pump of the proper rating for your application
2. A couple of bricks, broken in half to set the pump and waterplant containers on
3. Sprayhead for fountain or clear plastic tubing for a waterfall
4. An outdoor extension cord and GFI equipped power source
5. Waterplants (available locally at Wegman's Nursery in Redwood City)

Goldfish should not be added to your pond until after it has been established for a week. You can have one 2" goldfish per square foot of water surface area. Consult an aquarium shop for more information about maintaining fish in your pond environment.

Now let's make a fountain! Put the pump on a brick to keep it off the bottom of the container. This will reduce the frequency of clogging due to debris. Connect the sprayhead or tubing to the pump. Drill a hole in the back upper lip of the container, above the waterline, to thread the power cord (and clear tubing for waterfall) through. Add waterplants and water. Connect the power and adjust the flow to obtain the effect you want. The clear tubing can be hidden by plants up to the point where you want the water to reenter the pond through a bamboo spout or across a piece of slate. You can get a nice effect with a bamboo tube if you angle the tube back slightly so that the tube has to fill with water before running back into the pond.

I have installed water features in entry foyers and back decks of homes to add interest and disguise noise. This often becomes the homeowner's favorite part of the house.

Submitted by Jean Cary, Interior Decorator

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