

Terracotta and stone bowls are best sealed to prevent water loss.

# Small living WATER FEATURES



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A simple water feature is a beautiful, easy and inexpensive way to add interest to your garden, and maybe even grow a few extra edibles! *Calinda Anderson* shows us how.

IMAGES *Calinda Anderson* and *Sharon Verney*.

Seeing water, still or moving, has a powerful effect. A well-maintained and positioned water feature creates a relaxing feel and brings life to any space or garden, cooling the area it is in. The effect is the same no matter what style you choose, be it something as simple as a bird bath, a bowl filled with water lilies or water plants, a rustic wine barrel feature or a contemporary designer feature.

Nearly anything can be turned into a water feature, just make sure it is sealed and any holes plugged. There is a variety of pre-made water features also available at your local garden centre.

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To be successful at growing a large selection of beautiful water plants and water lilies, along with a few fish, try to position your feature where it gets all the morning sun followed by afternoon shade. If your feature will be in full sun, then the bigger the vessel the better. For hot, full-sun positions, you really want your water feature to be at least 70cm in diameter and 50-60cm in depth, otherwise it may well overheat during the summer months.

In this edition I am going to show you how to set up two different features; one with just plants and one that is filtered with a pump and has a light for added interest.

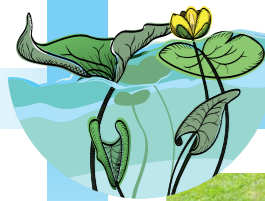
## A still water bowl

Glazed pots are excellent choices as they won't require sealing. Earthen, terracotta or natural stone should be sealed to prevent excess water loss. A lightweight plastic bowl is a great choice if heavy items are a bit of a struggle.

If your preference is for a simple feature without a pump, then this is the best way to set it up.

1. Once you have positioned your feature, fill about one-third with fine river gravel. This will act as a growing bed for your plants and a home for beneficial bacteria.
2. If you are planting a water lily, regardless of whether the water lily is potted or bare-rooted, push it deep into the gravel and fertilise well with slow-release pellets.
3. Start filling your feature with water. If the gravel is a bit dirty, keep the hose running and overflow the pot to clear it quicker.
4. Adding zeolite gravel or sand is a really important step. This absorbs ammonia and assists in keeping algae at bay. Zeolite is a naturally-occurring volcanic rock and a key part of any healthy living feature.
5. All other water plants, such as reeds and rushes, are best left in their own pot as they will need to be closer to the surface. If your bowl is deep you may need to prop up the pots with another empty up-turned pot, a brick or some large stones.





## WATER GARDENING



### A filtered water bowl

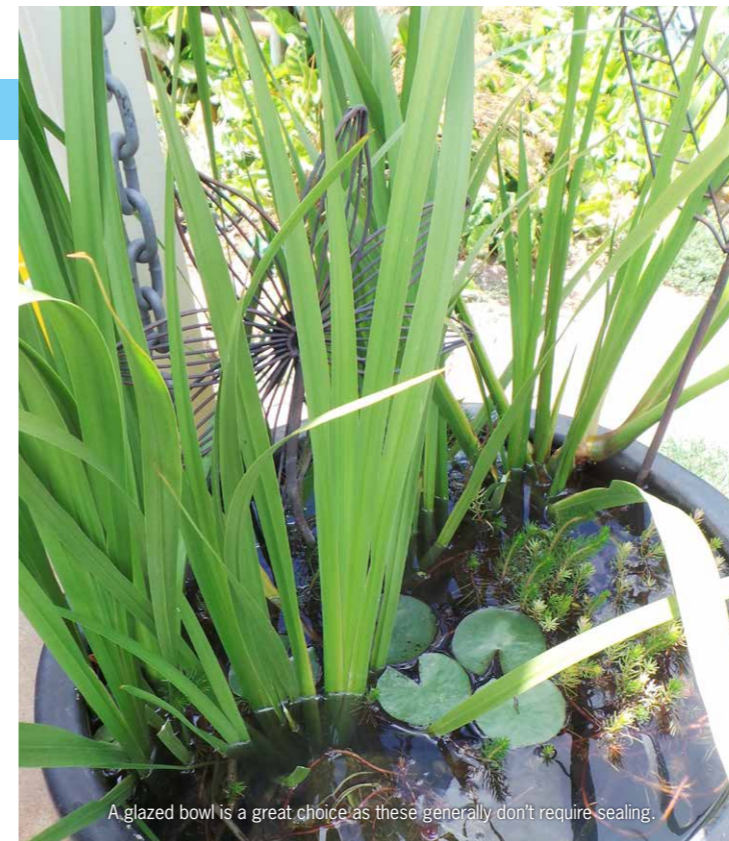
If you want to have the sight and sound of running water, adding a small pond pump will give that very nice effect. Pond pumps are easy to install, cheap and use hardly any power. As a guide, a small pump placed inside a wine barrel with a little fountain kit costs between \$30 and \$50, with an annual continuous running power cost of about \$20. Other options for small features are foggers, which create a mist across the water, and LED lights that create a soft, colourful glow.

The addition of an underwater light will really enhance your feature, especially when used to accent taller reeds and rushes. Together, with the gentle movement of water from the pump, you will get a lovely rippling effect. Just like a pond pump, pond lights are easy to install and very inexpensive to run.

Solar pumps and solar lights are available if you have no power in the area, but you will need to position the solar panel in full sun. Some units do have battery backups that allow running for up to two hours. The cost for solar pumps is still quite a bit more than the direct powered or low voltage pumps.

To set up your filtered water bowl:

1. Place the bowl in your desired position, taking into account placement of the power cords for the pump and lights, or the solar panel if you are using a solar pump.
2. Fill approximately one-third with fine river gravel.
3. Place the pump into the centre of the bowl.
4. Attach and position your lights.
5. Start filling the bowl with water. You may need to adjust the fountain head flow rate so that it doesn't splash too much.
6. Next, start planting your choice of water plants.



A glazed bowl is a great choice as these generally don't require sealing.

### Plant choices

If you want to make a bold statement and want a large display, the giant papyrus makes a striking effect year-round with its long stems growing up to 2m tall. Water hibiscus, water canna and pickerel all have striking foliage and showy flowers. These are all summer-growing plants reaching 1-2m in height. Just like water lilies, they will require fertilising throughout the growing season to ensure a brilliant floral display.

Low-growing plants with delicate foliage and flowers are perfect for small, shallow water bowls. Marsh flower and brahmi have compact, dense foliage that creates a carpet effect.

For small bowls and water features that are around 30cm in depth, the following are great choices that can be submerged; water poppy with its yellow flowers, nardoo with its clover-shaped leaves, and milfoil with its feathery foliage that can look like a bonsai pine forest when it breaks the surface.

Another popular choice for planting out water bowls is filling them with the edible water plants. Look out for water mint, water parsley, Vietnamese mint, water chestnuts, Lebanese cress, watercress, and kang kung. These will grow really well in floating baskets and make a great addition to your salads or cooking.



Adding more water plants like nardoo will help create a natural balance and beauty.

### Tips for the ongoing care and maintenance of both types of features cont...

- Bear in mind that as the bowl starts to mature, which can take 4-8 weeks, you may get some green water or algae growing. This is normal and natural. The best thing to do is to just bucket out some water and refresh it, pulling out any algae that may start to grow. If it really troubles you, or if the bowl gets really out of balance, add more zeolite or some beneficial bacteria such as Lysofoss.
- The more plants you put into the bowl, the better the ecology. You will need to trim from time to time and pull off any dead leaves to keep it looking lovely. Most importantly, you will need to fertilise the plants now and then with slow-release pellets.

### Tips for the ongoing care and maintenance of both types of features

- You can add fish in a week or two, once the water has had time to settle. Fish play a really important role in the feature by eating both mosquito larvae and algae. In bowls without pumps you will need to keep feeding to a minimum, but for bowls with pumps or filters you can feed a little more regularly. If you have lots of algae growing you can avoid feeding the fish until they have cleaned it all up.
- Using any chemicals that clear green water or algae will often be detrimental to the growth of water plants, so it is best to avoid these. You can use natural bacteria and zeolite to keep your feature clean and healthy.

