

ONCE UPON A TIME...

One Woman's Path to Nirvana

by Tom Burton, New Jersey

Once upon a time (about six years ago), Pat Tistan introduced a tiny water garden into her lovely terrestrial landscape and it added a new dimension and made her very happy. It continued to give her pleasure and the couple of fish she had began to grow and she wondered, should they have a bigger place to live? What should I be doing? This led her to



learn of the Club, which she promptly joined, and to start the familiar process of visiting with koi keepers and seeing other gardens and ponds. And of course the inevitable occurred – she wanted one! Fortunately, instead of digging a big hole, throwing in a liner and some fish and calling it a koi pond, she started gathering information and formulating a master plan. She even went to the length of getting herself elected (aka volunteered) to take on the job of Vice President of the Northern Chapter, a job she's performed well for almost three years now. But by doing so, she really got involved in the koi thing which ramped up the learning curve considerably. And finally, one day in the spring of 2002, she decided to take the plunge.

I had told her of a young man, Darren Lucas, who had been to my lecture on pond building, maybe five times, and who

seemed to thirst for info and soak up facts and was keen to build proper koi ponds. He'd gone through a couple iterations at home himself so had a pretty good feel for what didn't work and was learning fast how to do it right. He already had his own small landscaping business and knew how to operate equipment so seemed a natural for the job. Most importantly, he was willing to listen and take suggestion. And though Pat was encouraged to proceed by her husband Rick, she knew it would be hers to do and to maintain as he enjoys the fruit of



her gardening talents but is not one to participate routinely. Finally, the decision to go for it was made.

We'd been talking about this project for a couple of years so pretty much had in mind what the pond and water garden would look like, but a major decision had to be made as to where. A huge obstacle in the form of a very large deck out her back door and off the ground by about four feet, had to be considered. To be able to see the pond from the house, it just had to go. Once that was disposed of, the three of us -- Pat, Darren and I -- laid out the 13' x 13' water garden that would tiddle off into the 25' x 13' x 3' koi pond. It would be within six feet and about five feet below floor level of the house, visible from the kitchen, family room, upstairs bedroom and office. This surfaced another obstacle – how to get from the sliding back doors from the kitchen, down to ground level and the pond. Inspiration arrived in the form of a platform out the door with stairs on either side, sort of pyramid like. This fronted by a most unique fascia which mirrored the deck design. With those details out of the way then, the project got started in earnest.





Twenty-five tons of moss rock boulders were delivered one early morning, sounding like an earthquake. This followed by Darren showing up with two helpers and a huge backhoe and the frenzy of digging, placing the major stones, running the two bottom drain lines about 50 feet to the back of the property (the yard fortunately sloping away from the house and pond), and the setting up of the two separate filtration systems. Eight days later (YES, EIGHT DAYS LATER) the system was up and running!! With all the rocks in place and the filters ready for fish. In addition to the two filtration pumps, the skimmer pump pulls water into the basement to circulate it through the heating system in winter or return directly to the pond via a directional bulkhead fitting at other times. The water garden has its own bottom drain for the once a year clean out and there's a lovely waterfall fed by one of the filtration returns while the second systems feeds bulkhead directional returns to insure a slight current in the pond. An 80 watt UV keeps the green water monster at bay. Throughout it all, Pat was there -- with a hands on assist with anything from selecting and placing the boulders to feeding the hungry lot. While the crew did the heavy lifting, she did the abstract thinking that produced the

esthetically wonderful result. Additional pictures can be found on the cover of this *Mid-Atlantic Koi* magazine!

With the pond done, it was time for Pat to enter her element and transform the landscape into the fabulous garden it has become. If ever a person had two green thumbs, she's it. The place has evolved to one of the most beautiful in the club with specimen trees and bushes to ground covers to moss to gravel paths, to a most unusual deck, to the addition of an 8 by 11 foot thermo pane window to see it all from the family room. But she's not finished yet! And, along the way she's accumulated a wonderful array of koi that just keep getting bigger and better and more beautiful. In addition, she's added about a dozen small simulated rock lights throughout, making the nighttime view quite magical.

The moral to this story is, with knowledge and planning and vision and lots of effort, anything is possible.

Congratulations Pat. You've come a long way. And they all lived happily ever after.

The End

