



PondScapes Atlanta



UNWELCOME VISITORS

When building a pond we get excited about all the wonderful things that it brings- peace, relaxation, beautiful fish and colorful plants. We don't however, think of the potential hassles some visitors may bring. Fortunately most ponds don't experience unwelcome visitors, and for those that do, many simple solutions can be found.

Pond pests run from the neighbors cat (or yours!) to turtles and birds. The most often complained about visitor is the Great Blue Heron. This is a very large bird that often stands over three feet tall, and has a wingspan of five feet. This bird loves fish. It is designed to catch and eat fish, and is very effective. If you have a small pond and a hungry heron, you might be left with no fish in a few hours. Herons are wading birds, and like to fish in shallow ponds usually under two feet in depth. They don't swim, they just 'stab' at the fish after standing incredibly still for quite a while. These birds often go for fish larger than they can swallow, leaving them for dead. If you find a fish with puncture marks but otherwise intact, chances are a heron got it.

Several things can be done to discourage herons, and also to protect the fish. Luckily for us, herons don't much like other herons, and will leave a pond alone if they see another bird there. A life like plastic replica of a heron works very well in keeping the real thing away. Motion sensors that turn on a hose also work well in scaring away herons and other predators.

The most effective tool in keeping herons at bay is to build the pond so that it is undesirable to the heron. Design the pond with no shallow areas, and keep it deep – over two feet is best. This prevents the heron from finding a comfortable spot to wait. In addition, providing caves or hiding places for the fish works well. If the pond is 'unproductive' for the heron, it will usually go find greener pastures quickly, and not bother returning.

Another common and widespread pest is the raccoon. This critter looks cute, but he can be mean, and effective on your fish. Raccoons will 'fish' with their hands, and grab onto anything they can catch. They can be quite persistent, and will often come back in a few minutes after being scared off. The best protection from raccoons is to provide lots of deep hiding places for the fish. The raccoons don't like to get much more than their arms wet, and can't reach anything over about one foot deep.

Despite all the publicity cats don't usually pose much of a problem for the average pond keeper. My cats are more interested in the fish food and frogs than the fish. Generally the same suggestions for raccoons work for cats as well. A motion detector attached to a hose can be especially effective and often entertaining too!

Frogs, turtles and otters are less frequent pests, but do sometime cause problems. Turtles and otters will wipe out a pond in short order. Whatever they can catch, they will eat. Otters are especially bad as they can eat the larger fish that a turtle can't get. Fortunately otters usually don't stay around to party, and will eat their fill and move on. If you find a few fish heads, and a large pile of scales near the pond, it's a sure sign an otter had a snack at your expense. As you would expect, otters are usually seen in ponds or more rural areas, where the yard has a fishing lake or a creek nearby.

Frogs only pose a problem if they are really big bullfrogs or green frogs. These guys will eat small fish every once in a while, but usually they stick to bugs. Frogs turtles and otters need to be removed to keep them from eating the fish.

Another much misunderstood pest is the snake. Many of you believe that the snake is bad no matter what, but I disagree. All I have ever seen a snake do in a garden pond is scare a few people and their dogs. Occasionally the snake might eat a fish or two, but always the smaller fish (under eight inches). When a snake moves into your pond, chances are he's after the frogs, not the fish. If you can stand it, I wouldn't worry about the snake, it will probably move on soon enough. If you can't deal with a snake in your pond, then you are going to have to catch it and relocate it or call in some one to do it for you. Whatever you do, don't kill it. It is not an evil creature, just one of God's misunderstood ones. Chances are it is not a venomous snake. Everyone thinks it's a cotton mouth (also called a water moccasin) but they simply are not found in the Atlanta area. They are found in the southern part of the State and up near Rome (see the range map in the "Is it a Water Moccasin" document below). In the Atlanta area I have NEVER seen a cotton mouth venomous (poisonous) snake at a garden pond and I don't expect I ever will. To relocate a snake just take it a few miles away and let it go in a creek or fishing pond.

Well that's all the common pests you are likely to see. To be sure you will encounter a few more. Don't hesitate to give us a call if you have any questions or can think of anything we need to add. Have fun with your pond!

Hear are a few great sites to get more info on Georgia Wildlife:

"NonGame Animals and Plants" from Georgia Department of Natural Resources
<http://georgiawildlife.dnr.state.ga.us/content/displaynavigation.asp?TopCategory=5>

"Is it a Water Moccasin?" from Georgia Department of Natural Resources
<http://georgiawildlife.dnr.state.ga.us/content/displaycontent.asp?txtDocument=221>

Snake Brochure from the University of Georgia
<http://www.uga.edu/srel/snakebrochure.htm>

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