

Aquascaping: Planting and Maintenance

Introduction

The aesthetic and wildlife habitat value of ponds and water retention areas can be greatly enhanced by establishing and managing certain desirable plants. Undesirable plants and lack of management will result in an unsightly area and perhaps a health hazard. Aquascaping is the term used to describe the planting of aquatic and wetland plants. A good way to describe aquascaping is landscaping in and around water. Florida has seen a recent surge of interest in aquascaping from both home owners and developers. Whether dealing with a large or small, natural or man made (detention, fish, etc.) pond, there are certain guidelines that should be followed in order to reduce future management problems.

This circular addresses planting and maintenance, the two areas that account for most of the problems people encounter in aquascaping.

Planting

Site selection and preparation are the first steps toward successful aquascaping. Unless there is no choice (as in the case of some retention ponds), avoid planting an aquascape in an area that isn't suited for it. Examples of unsuitable sites are those where the water level is extremely seasonal, or where runoff from industry or agriculture will damage the aquascape. Even if you have a perfect site for an aquascaping project, the following steps should be taken well in advance of the first planting.

1. Determine where the normal, or average, water line will be. This is especially important in detention pond plantings because the water line will vary in many cases. Although some wetland plants will tolerate dry and wet seasons, there are many that will die if they are kept too wet or too dry. In cases where the water varies, determine where the water will be for the majority of the year, and designate this as your average water level. This may require the assistance of agencies such as the Soil Conservation Service, the Water Management District for your area, or simply observe the area for at least a year before you plant. You may also want to locate the pond near a source of well water, in order to maintain the water level during dry periods.
2. Measure water depth and area of the site to be aquascaped, paying special attention to the shoreline and shallow areas where most work will take place. Without proper measurements, it is hard to determine the quantity and types of plants that will be required. As you are measuring the depth, it is a good idea to place stakes that represent

different depths. Later, these measurements will assist in deciding the quantity and types of plants you need, and during planting will let you know the boundaries in which to plant them.

3. If desired, excavation can create planting zones that originally did not exist in the area. Soil and rocks removed to deepen one area can be used to create shallow areas elsewhere, or can be incorporated into landscaping around the pond. Deepening the margins around the edge of a pond can help manage plants that might invade into the water (i.e. Torpedo Grass or Water Primrose). Detention ponds designed for stormwater management must be designed according to Florida Department of Environmental Regulation (FDER) or Water Management District (WMD) guidelines. Therefore, always check with DER, Stormwater Management Section (904/488-0782), and local regulatory agencies before beginning any excavation.
4. Develop a detailed plan that includes types and numbers of plants needed. The accuracy and detail of your measurements will play a key role in the planting plan. For ease in planning, divide the aquascape into three major planting zones: shoreline, shallow water, and deep water (Figure 1). The table at the end of this bulletin lists some plants that can be used, including the zone in which they will grow and suggested planting densities. A well thought out plan will allow you to proceed quickly during the actual planting, and will help ensure survival of the plants.

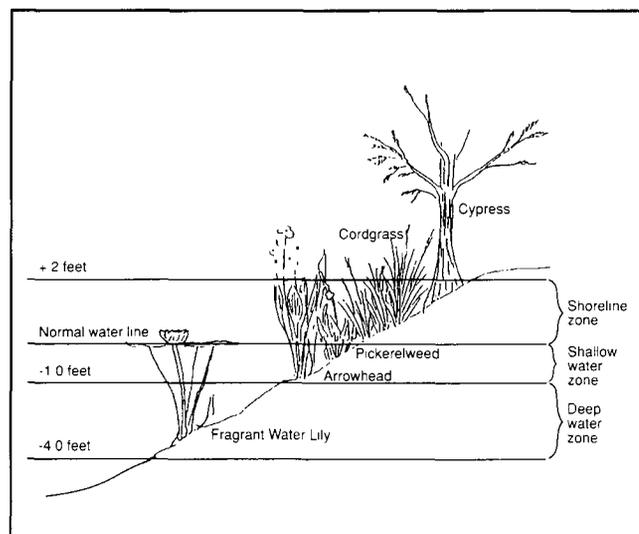


Figure 1. Planting zones