Adding a waterscape could improve your garden space

K-State horticulture expert says the presence of water in a natural space can benefit mental well-being

By Maddy Rohr, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Limited by space in your garden? Looking for a new project to enhance your space? Wanting to attract birds and pollinators to your garden?

Kansas State University horticulture expert Cynthia Domenghini suggests adding a water element to the garden.

“Preliminary research suggests the presence of water in a natural space can benefit mental well-being. The sound of running water helps reduce noise pollution and provides a relaxing escape,” Domenghini said. “Water attracts birds and other pollinators which also contribute to positive well-being. Whether a bubbling rock, pond or waterfall, sensory interests are piqued by waterscapes in the landscape.”

Domenghini said water features don’t have to be large and complex, making it a great weekend project consisting of a container, water tough or large flower pot to hold water, or creating a larger reservoir to invite wildlife.

“There are myriad designs of fountains and ponds that will fit into any size garden,” Domenghini said.

Consider accessibility, interactivity and maintenance when deciding how to incorporate a therapeutic water feature into your landscape, she adds.

“Though an isolated water feature can become a destination where visitors may venture to seek refuge, if it is too inconvenient to access it, the feature loses efficacy,” Domenghini said.

She recommends positioning a water feature close to pathways that are frequented regularly so more people can enjoy the benefits, also making it easier to monitor the feature for maintenance concerns.
When adding movement to the water feature, people can interact through the calming effect of the noise the waterscape makes. Depending on the type of feature, it may be possible to allow play in the waterscape, Domenghini said. Consider adding stepping stones up to the feature, but always consider safety and follow necessary precautions when adding a water feature to the landscape.

“Incorporating a water feature into the landscape will have limited benefits to well-being if it requires intense maintenance,” Domenghini said. “Enter into this project with the understanding of the required maintenance and start small as you learn the basics. Don’t allow this therapeutic feature to become a stress-inducer.”

Domenghini and her colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes and gardens. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden and yard-related questions to Domenghini at cdom@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.

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Story by:
Maddy Rohr
Maddy23@ksu.edu

For more information:
Cynthia Domenghini
Cdom@ksu.edu