

## Waterfalls in the Garden

Maureen McCracken

At the end of a hectic day, the tranquility of a beautiful backyard waterfall is soothing, peaceful, and *oh so* relaxing.... To that add an iced tea or mint julep, a comfy hammock, a good book—and *voilà!*—you have a little piece of heaven in your own backyard, an instant escape from the daily whirlwind of our busy lives. In today's fast-paced and crazy world, it is no wonder waterfalls are gaining popularity.



A waterfall is defined as a cascade of water falling from a height, formed when a river or stream flows over a precipice or steep incline. For purposes of a backyard waterfall, we can truncate that definition to: a cascade of water falling from a height that creates the beautiful sound of a waterfall.

The Japanese have long recognized the therapeutic effect of water sounds in the garden—how a gentle splash and the gurgle of rippling water create a sense of meditative calm where one can find peace and truly appreciate the simple beauty of nature. For these reasons, water is an extremely important element in Japanese gardens.

How might you transform a nice backyard into a tranquil paradise where you can escape to relax and regenerate? Add a waterfall, of course!

**A simple water feature is a fountain with pump.**

There are many things to consider and plan when creating a waterfall:

1. What type of waterfall will work in your yard? Something as simple as a fountain with a pump? Or a more complex large stream, pond and waterfall combination? Or perhaps something between, such as a pond-less waterfall? There are high waterfalls, low waterfalls, multi-level waterfalls and many other designs to consider.
2. Size will be a deciding factor in the type of waterfall that will work in your yard. The waterfall needs to fit its surroundings so as not overpower a small space.
3. Cost is an obvious consideration. Generally speaking, the larger and more complex the design, the higher the cost.
4. Sound is one of the main reasons people choose to add a waterfall. It adds another dimension to the garden experience. Here again, there are decisions to be made: the higher the waterfall the louder the sound; the larger the volume of water, the louder the sound; the faster the water movement, the louder the sound. Accordingly, you must decide what type of sound you wish to add to your garden. This will have a significant effect on your final design.
5. Will you build it yourself or hire a landscape design company to build your dream waterfall? Or will you purchase a ready-to-install fountain or wall waterfall?
6. If you decide to build a more elaborate waterfall, you need to consider the type of material you will use to construct it. The three most common types of construction start with a preformed waterfall liner, a flexible liner or a precast or poured concrete base. Obviously, the idea here is to create a water-impermeable structure to direct the water down the waterfall, collect the water, and then re-circulate it back to the top.
7. Stone is generally used to camouflage the structure of the waterfall, stream and pond. It helps to make it appear more natural. There are several types of stone to consider: natural stone, flag stone, boulders and large rocks, river rocks and artificial stones. Your choice will depend on personal preference, budget and design style.
8. Unless you are fortunate enough to have a property with a natural waterfall, all waterfalls will require a pump. The larger the waterfall, the larger the pump will be needed to move the water from the bottom and then back to the top of the waterfall. A well-constructed waterfall doesn't waste water. It should be designed with no leakage, so the water is reused over and over by the use of the pump. Refer to the Waterfall Weir chart to correctly size the pump needed for your waterfall: <http://www.savvyhomemade.com/waterfall-pumps.html>.

9. Designing your pond will take into consideration your personal style and surroundings. Design ideas include natural-style waterfalls, Japanese garden minimalist style waterfalls, large multi-tiered fountains, pond fountains, swimming pool waterfalls, manmade rock waterfalls, pond-less waterfalls, streams and any other creative water features that add the sound of falling water.
10. You may also want to consider adding lighting to your waterfall. This is a wonderful addition, which adds visual interest to the soothing sound of water for evening enjoyment.



Left: An Asian-inspired pond-less waterfall  
Right: A cascading waterfall with pond

For the do-it-yourself homeowner, there are excellent instructions on this website:  
[http://landscaping.about.com/od/watergardens/a/waterfalls\\_3.htm](http://landscaping.about.com/od/watergardens/a/waterfalls_3.htm).

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**Maureen McCracken**, an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer since 2006, has lived and gardened in places from Toronto, Canada, to Sarasota, FL—and has experienced USDA Hardiness Zones from frigid to subtropical, and rainfall ranging from desert-like to “monsoonish.” Yet, her favorite is Charlotte, NC, with its great climate, which allows for year-round gardening and numerous plant choices.