

HOW TO CLEAN AN ECOSYSTEM POND

The following pond cleaning information and instructions are specifically for a Phoenix pond built using Aquascape (or similar) philosophy and equipment.

These instructions are for a complete drain & clean. If you are just cleaning the filters this year, skip to the “Preparing the Filters” section.

Remember, if you can see the rocks clearly on the bottom of your pond, you only need to do the filters this year. However, if the bottom of your pond is covered in mulm, a complete drain and clean is advised.

Complete Drain & Clean

This process is best done when the water is still cold and has not yet begun to warm up in the late Spring. When the water is cold, the fish are in a dormancy phase and less likely to become stressed by the process. This type of cleaning takes some time, depending on the size of your pond, so start early in the day.

Checklist:

- Wading boots and old clothes you don't mind getting muddy
- Rubber gloves
- Discharge piping (enough to get the pond water where you want it)
- Pump (the pump from your skimmer with a makeshift screen of chicken wire or similar material can be used — something that keeps your fish, frogs, etc., from being sucked out)
- Garden hose with a high-pressure nozzle
- Container for your fish – something that you can cover is best so that they don't jump out!
- Aeration device for the temporary fish container is advisable if you have large fish that will be out of the pond for more than a couple of hours
- Sharp pruner for root division
- Bottle of de-chlorinator

Getting Started:

To drain the pond and prepare for a clean-out, follow these easy steps:

1. Prepare the temporary holding tank **IN THE SHADE** for your finned friends.
2. Unplug the pump from the waterfall. Connect the discharge pipe to the pump that you've decided to use and plug the pump back in.
3. Use some of the pond water to fill the container that will temporarily house the fish (typically not the deepest part, but water from a shallow shelf area). We recommend saving as much of your healthy, clear water as possible. If the fish are to be left in the holding container longer than a few hours, then predator cover and aeration is advisable.

4. Place the pump in the deepest part of the pond.
5. Place the end of the discharge pipe so that the water drains into the surrounding landscape (be sure to maximize the water benefit by relocating the pipe 2 or 3 times to allow the water to seep into the ground and not flood the area). This is a great opportunity to deep-water any trees that might need it. The floor mulm makes great tree fertilizer!
6. When the water is down to about six inches deep in the pond, unplug the pump and net the fish into their temporary housing. If you have large Koi, be sure to aerate the water and put a cover on it!
7. Once the fish and other aquatic critters are in their temporary holding tank, you can begin hosing down the inside of the pond. Don't try to scrub all the algae away! Some algae on the rocks will prove beneficial in re-developing your ecosystem. For an average-sized pond (10'x15'), this should take around 15 minutes.
8. Removing debris from your rocks and gravel is the next step, which is easy, if you work from the top down. Starting with the top shelves first, rinse the rocks and gravel, hand-picking any leaves or larger debris as you go – and don't forget to clean out those Koi caves. Continue to work your way down to the center of the pond. While you're doing this, the pump should continue to run to keep the pond drained. Any sediment or debris will be channeled to the deepest point, then removed and discharged by the pump. When the water starts cleaning up around the pump, unplug it.
9. Now that the tough stuff is done, you can trim and thin the aquatic plants. Be sure to thin from the roots!

Preparing the Filters:

1. Unplug the pump to clean the Biofalls® filter, if you're just starting out on this step. Drain it and clean the mats and bags of biomedica by hosing them down until the water runs clear. Using a wet/dry vac, clean out the filter box. Re-seed the biological filter with beneficial bacteria. Plug the pump back in.
2. If you have a skimmer, use the pump to drain the water out and then hose it down. If you're not draining the entire pond, then place a water-proof barrier of some kind in front of the skimmer and allow your pond pump to draw down the water in just the skimmer. This can be as simple as a piece of stiff cardboard wrapped in a plastic trash bag.
3. With the water drawn down, and the pond pump still running, use a wet/dry shop vac to remove mud and accumulated debris from around the pump. Then remove the skimmer barrier and listen for your stream to begin anew.

Returning the Fish:

1. Now that the clean-out is done, re-fill the pond with the reserved water from the fish holding tank until the water in the holding tank is just enough to keep the fish. Continue filling the pond with a hose, if necessary.
2. Once your pond is half full, you can prepare to reintroduce your fish.
3. If you're on City water, and your temporary holding tank holds less than half of your pond water, use a de-chlorinator product to neutralize chlorine, chloramines, ammonia, and heavy metals to render the water fish-safe.

4. Make sure the water in the pond and the water in the holding tank are the same temperature before you move the fish back into their home. They're going to be a little skittish, but they'll get over it and quickly start foraging their freshly disturbed home.
5. Re-connect your pump, plug it in, and you're ready for Spring and Summer!
6. Clean up and have a tall one next to your pond!