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Outdoor Water Features: What Can You Do With \$1,000?

...From the pages of Suburban Home and Garden Resource Guide...



There's nothing better than relaxing in your backyard listening to the soothing sound of trickling water, so we challenged leading designers and vendors of outdoor water features to come up with some budget-conscious solutions for homeowners. It turns out there are plenty of options—from mosaic water walls to decorative urns to patio ponds—all within a budget of \$1,000 or less. The best things in life may not always be free, but they are relatively affordable.

"Homeowners have a couple of nice options when it comes to outdoor water features in the \$1,000-and-under range," says Ed Marinchak of Create A Scape in Cherry Hill, which next month will be opening a retail center exclusively devoted to outdoor water features in Marlton.

Coming in at about \$1,000, Marinchak's first choice of outdoor water feature is a natural basalt stone fountain that sits atop a surround of decorative stone or tumbled glass disguising a below-ground water basin. Marinchak suggests making the fountain part of the patio so people can walk around it. "Add some lights on the rocks and you've got yourself a beautiful water feature," he says.

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For homeowners with their hearts set on having a pond with fish, Marinchak recommends a pond kit. "Starter pond kits are a great way to get initiated into aquatic gardens," he says. A pond kit comes with a prefabricated fiberglass or plastic liner and a pump and bubbler to re-circulate the water and keep it oxygenated. "For \$1,000 you could probably get a pond that's 5x7 [feet] and 18 inches deep," Marinchak says. "Add a few aquatic plants and some comets [small goldfish], and there's your pond."

Ed Marinchak / Create A Scape

"An aqua basin with a decorative feature, an urn or statuary on top, makes an absolutely beautiful and stunning water feature," says Diane Baker of James Ponds in Doylestown, PA. "[These types of water features give] you that soothing sound of water and would run about \$1,000 if we install it for you or \$700 for the do-it-yourselfer."

Diane Baker / James Ponds

Sky Mirror Fountain photo courtesy of StoneForest.com

"The most cost-effective [feature] is a pondless water feature with a decorative urn or ceramic pot, where the water cascades into a basin filled with decorative river stone," says Mike Pasquarello, a degreed landscape architect at Elite Landscaping in Berlin. For eco-conscious homeowners with rainwater-harvesting systems already in place, Pasquarello suggests running a pipe from the overflow spout on the rain barrel to the basin to channel the overflow water.

Pasquarello mentions manufactured fountains as another option. Especially popular with town house owners with limited space, manufactured fountains include designs like lion heads or a pair of Venetian dolphins that hang on a wall above a basin, with the water re-circulating between the two. "A wall fountain like this runs about \$500 for the fountain itself and \$500 for the labor to install it," Pasquarello says.

Mike Pasquarello / Elite Landscaping

George Mihalchik, owner of aquatic connections in TREVose, PA, says that disappearing fountains (similar to pondless waterfalls) on the patio or even on the deck are the way to go. "A two-foot-high decorative urn or nice piece of pottery with water cascading over the top provides that trickling water sound that everyone finds so relaxing," says Mihalchik. A fountain similar to the one pictured above will cost about \$300 for DIY types, as Mihalchik says the most expensive part of a water feature is the labor for installation.

"You could also go with a patio pond," says Mihalchik. "Patio ponds are mini-ponds 18 inches deep by 36 inches and have shelves or ledges where you can plant a water lily or two. You get that water sound and can even add a few mini goldfish."

George Mihalchik / Aquatic Connections

"In a townhouse setting or in a small, confined space like a courtyard, use a wall as a palette to paint a water feature on," says Joe Gagnon, owner of Outdoor Environments in Doylestown, PA. "[A water feature designer or vendor can help you] create a mosaic on the walls with ceramic or recycled glass tiles and have the water cascade down the

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wall. Or find an old washboard at a flea market or a piece of corrugated metal to use."

Gagnon provides the following advice for homeowners considering installing an outdoor water feature. "Take the space into account and keep it proportional," he says. "Use lighting but install it below the water so it's muted. Subtle speaks loudly. You want your water feature to be soothing, like a babbling brook, not Niagara Falls."

Joe Gagnon / Outdoor Environments

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