



# Natural Water Features Offer Spa Benefits at Home

A BARRINGTON BACKYARD MAKEOVER CREATES A DREAMY NATURAL OASIS

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**W**HAT BEGAN AS a desire to replace an aging deck morphed into a 1,600-square-foot therapeutic natural spa swimming pool surrounded by trees, boulders, and plants.

“Originally, my intention was to replace and upgrade the backyard deck,” the Barrington homeowner explained. “But building material prices were through the roof during the COVID pandemic. Knowing that I was going to have to spend the money on a replacement deck, I got to thinking about what else I could do with the money that would be bigger, and better.”

A large lawn dominated the center of the homeowner’s backyard. A small waterfall and

pond were off to one side. In-ground perennial gardens, dotted with shrubs, his mom’s fringe tree, and a flowering dogwood, marked the perimeter. Mature pines defined the back lot line.

“I had this big green space that was framed like it was waiting for something,” the homeowner said. “Being an amateur gardener, I knew the backyard had good bones. It had good structure with the big pine trees in the back.”

After decades in his home, which he had also renovated, what he really wanted was something different outside his back door—a complete backyard makeover. A vacation at home. He recalled the pleasant experience of building the small waterfall and pond back in 2011, working with area

professional pond designer/builder Larry Carnes, president of Reflections Water Gardens in West Dundee, Illinois (see sidebar).

“I wanted something that reminded me of the cenotes in Yucatán, Mexico,” the homeowner said. “Whenever I visited those I was always very inspired. So, I thought, ‘I’m just going to build this thing.’” He made the call to Carnes.

## A SPA VACATION AT HOME

“He wanted a place to relax and rejuvenate,” Carnes said. “He wanted the space easily accessible for family members and asked for a sundeck, which we built adjacent to the pool’s steps.” The existing water feature is incorporated in the renovation,

*The natural swimming pool is the backyard’s centerpiece, transforming the former lawn into a therapeutic spa. Water is heated, highly filtered, and super-saturated with oxygen.*



*Plants and hardscapes work together to add a sense of enclosure to the natural swimming pool for a feeling of oneness that cleanses the mind, feeds the spirit, and nourishes the soul.*

which also has a new, three-foot waterfall. The two waterfalls seamlessly appear as one.

Like a vision straight out of Yucatán, the water feature is the centerpiece of the backyard. Where once there was lawn, there is now a spa pool. And it is surrounded by plants including water lilies, pickerel weeds, sweet flag, iris, and, of course, lotus, which is Carnes' signature on every one of his natural waterscapes. In February, the Barrington design received a Gold Award from the state's landscape industry association, the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association (ILCA).

At its deepest, the pool is six feet. It has zero chlorine. Proprietary filtration technology keeps the water pristine as it is saturated with pure oxygen.

"This pool is heated, highly filtered, and super-saturated with oxygen that comes from fast-moving, negatively-charged microbubbles," Carnes said. His team provides ongoing maintenance services to keep filters and systems working at their optimum. Tiny bubbles attract, trap, and help eliminate positively-charged contaminants and anaerobic pathogens that can cause a range of infections.

"Everybody who swims in the pool is impressed with how the water just feels different on their bodies," the homeowner said. "You don't have to worry about chlorine of any sort." Scientists say swimming in oxygenated water can trigger the release of hormones that help you feel more alert and focused. Beneficial microbubbles

penetrate skin pores, hair follicles, and sebaceous glands resulting in higher levels of detoxification than from non-oxygenated water.

### NATURALLY HEALTHIER, CLEANER, CLEARER WATER

Oxygenated water's cleansing, antibacterial, and anti-drying properties may help reduce inflammation, according to research. It supports hydration that maintains skin vitality, reduces irritation, and can help smooth the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles. Skin is gently exfoliated, cleansed, and detoxed, causing it to look firmer, revitalized, and more plump. You appear healthier, like you spent a day at the pool when in fact you did—in your own backyard.

Backyard benefits can go even further. While this pool employs super-oxygenation, it additionally uses a proprietary water filtration system. That's technology that stares down bacteria and wipes it from natural swimming pools and ponds.

Small rocks and pebbles naturally filter water, complementing the work of Wisconsin Lannon Stone and Missouri-weathered limestone boulders, which define the pool's structure and add natural appeal. Boulders and stone provide places for bacteria to colonize as they filter out debris from fish, insects, and plants. Water is healthier, cleaner, and clearer.

Water flow and ambient sound emanate from the two waterfalls that appear as one. Part of the original waterfall, an existing retaining wall supports large boulders and cobblestones that form the new feature.

A wide stairway with a handrail provides



*Water flow and ambient sound emanate from two waterfalls that appear as one.*



*A submerged ledge provides space for reflection and meditation, and a transition point into the pool. Water is crystal clear thanks to mica from the beach-sand bottom and tiny bubbles from micro-aeration.*

support, and access to an ankle-deep wading pool. The submerged ledge provides space for reflection and meditation. Nearby, a Zen-style garden features annual plants such as canna lily and nasturtium in hot colors of red and yellow. Fragrance comes from calamint, aromatic thyme, and ‘Chocolate Chip’ ajuga.

### SERENITY FROM THE SUNDECK

Dipping your feet while sitting on the ledge, you’ll notice the water is crystal-clear to the pool’s beach-sand bottom. Not only does beach sand just feel better on bare feet, but it also provides aeration that reduces muck build-up and controls anaerobic bacteria.

All of Earth’s elements work together for good in this backyard pool. One of those “good things” is air. More air, more oxygen, in the water means it has vitality to move, shine, and shimmer in the sun. When kissed by the sun, mica, a soft, flaky and shiny mineral in beach sand, glistens.

Within the natural setting, boulder-built containers separate serene, 200-square-foot lotus and water lily beds from the swimming areas. The adjacent slab sundeck is built from inside the water and provides the perfect place for morning coffee, perhaps a cool beverage, and for reflecting on the entirety of the backyard remodel.

Off the sundeck, large slab stones beckon feet to step along a custom walking path through the lotus and water lily beds. Japanese honeysuckle, blue flower pickerel, and sweet flag add to the contemplative experience of the journey. Within this unique space, plants and hardscapes work



*A lush turf carpet leads to a wide stairway with handrail, supporting access to the natural swimming pool.*

together to add a sense of enclosure to the natural swimming pool—a feeling of oneness that cleanses the mind, feeds the spirit, and nourishes the soul.

The result delivers on the homeowner’s vision for the space he said. “The birds also do love the waterfalls,” he added. He advises others who may be thinking of doing outdoor renovations to consider the style and age of their home. And to realize the process requires flexibility and will take time.

### THE CREATIVE PROCESS

“Stay involved in the process,” he said. “Good communication is important. Be mindful that there’s weather, there’s unforeseen things—so many things that aren’t in anyone’s control. Like any construction, you may have to undo something in order to redo it, depending on how old your

property infrastructure is. Be patient through the permitting process.”

“The process is just as important as the results,” Carnes said. “From the get-go, the process of crafting this project was one of challenge. For starters, it began during the pandemic, which fueled delays in permitting and engineering. Once those were finally secured months later, site coordination required a well-thought-out plan.”

Access to the backyard was very tight due to mature trees in the homeowner’s front yard, and fencing and mature trees along the perimeter property lines. Carnes and his team used the neighbor’s property for staging boulders and materials. Then, the only entry point for the supplies to the backyard was a 10-foot-wide side entrance



*Above: Boulders and stone provide places for bacteria to colonize as they naturally filter out debris. Water is healthier, cleaner and clearer. Below: Adjacent to the sundeck, large slab stones beckon feet to step along a custom walking path through the lotus and waterlily beds.*



*Within this naturalistic setting, perennial and aquatic plantings blend with mature pine trees to create a serene backyard escape for the homeowners. A Zen-style garden features aromatherapy benefits from fragrant plantings, including aromatic thyme and 'Chocolate Chip' ajuga.*

partially blocked by the home's air conditioner. Coordinating movement of supplies was a slow, step-by-step process.

"Once we finally got all our materials and supplies back to the backyard construction site, we had to create a way for our machines to work the materials into the area of the pond," Carnes said. "We built access ways in the middle of the project with pallets and plywood and drove our machines on top."


### LIVING THE POND LIFESTYLE

While the Barrington project is unique, Carnes said the challenges it presented in on-site design and structural engineering are not. Challenging the mettle of pond design/build pros is part of the job. In so doing, small spaces seem to visually expand as creativity and ingenuity marry into water features that define the client's lifestyle.

As environmental, economic, and cultural influences continue to change the way we live outdoors, pond lifestyle trends are evolving to meet the needs of discriminating homeowners.

While there will always be room for fountains, water gardens, and koi ponds, the market is evolving, Carnes said. "The pools we built just a few years ago were called 'recreation' ponds. Today, they have evolved into bigger, more customized styles of natural swimming pools. They work in harmony with the typography of the landscape and our clients' lifestyle needs."

Homeowners ask Carnes for customized experiences and backyard escapes that they can't get anywhere else.

"Our natural swimming pool in Barrington is truly unique," the homeowner said. "It is a catalyst for bringing people together. I get a lot of joy from this outdoor experience. We have improved the value of our quality of living." 

*Sue Markgraf is the founder and president of GreenMark Media. An award-winning reporter, editor, field producer, and media relations practitioner, Markgraf has more than 30 years in media and corporate, non-profit, and agency communications, with specific focuses on the horticulture, environment, and agriculture industries. Visit [greenmarkpr.com](http://greenmarkpr.com).*



*Reflections Water Gardens owner Larry Carnes is an award-winning leader in outdoor water features, natural ponds, and waterfalls.*

## Water Garden Expert Larry Carnes

Larry Carnes' remarkable journey to owner and president of Reflections Water Gardens, founded in 2010 and located in West Dundee, Illinois, started with a leap of faith, a belief in an idea, and the incredible support of his wife, Becky. Today, Carnes is one of the waterscape industry's most respected leaders and design/build consultants.

His path began as a child growing up swimming in lakes and ponds and exploring nature. It eventually led to studies in art and architecture, which intersected with plant life and landscaping. Through the years, Carnes worked for several industry-related companies, gaining knowledge in horticulture, arboriculture, patio design and installation, waterscaping, and landscape architecture.

After building his home, he and Becky wanted to add a sundeck and swimming pool. But their vision for their backyard waterscape was unlike any being built. So, Carnes designed and built it himself—his first backyard natural swimming pool. Soon after, Becky surprised him with a truck. She encouraged him to quit his full-time job and to start building water features.

As he begins every project, Carnes' conceptual designs are legendary, just like his multi-award-winning waterscapes. Using his creativity and eye for design, he renders video and photographic concepts that are working designs, yet pieces of art. This puts the client in the experience of the water feature before a shovel ever hits the ground. No two Reflections Water Gardens creations are the same. Each is custom and handcrafted from design to installation to fit his client's lifestyle.

Today, Reflections Water Gardens designs and builds high-end waterscapes. Located on residential properties and commercial developments, Reflections Water Gardens waterscapes are found throughout the Midwest and select national destinations. *Learn more at [reflectionswatergardens.com](http://reflectionswatergardens.com).*