

# HOTWGPS Newsletter

Volume 12 issue 10/11

October/November 2020

## HOTWGPS Events

Our “Holiday Party” will be November 17 at 6:30 PM at the Galt’s home. Additional information was provided in Becky’s email. There will be a “Chinese Christmas” gift exchange \$20.00 maximum value per gift. Each participant brings a gift to exchange. There will be a “potluck” meal with the meat from DeMaria’s BBQ provided by HOTWGPS.

## Presidential notes

Membership dues are due January 1 and must be paid by February 1, 2021 for your membership to remain current.

Please volunteer to help with the planning and execution of our 2021 pond tour June 12 & 13.

We need ideas from you for our meeting programs, newsletters and or field trips.

Waco and Woodway are “flushing” their water systems. They are using chlorine instead if the chloramines they have been using. When adding tap water to your ponds, double up on the dechlorinator from now through the end of December.



## AquaNooga Tip of the Week

Sept 22, 2020

Many beneficial pond bacteria lose effectiveness in cold water. [Microbe Lift Autumn/Winter Prep](#) works in cold water and even under ice. These bacteria will also help break down leaf accumulation thus helping keep a healthy pond both this winter and the following season.



I sure am glad we got the nets up BEFORE this big leaf drop!! From Harv & Georgia

## Pond Vac

As a reminder, this is a “Members Only” benefit. You can rent this super-duper pond cleaning machine very reasonably! John Enders is the “official pond Vac keeper”. Call him 254-848-9596 or send him an email at [jnenders@aol.com](mailto:jnenders@aol.com) to schedule your time with the machine. One note of caution when using the pond Vac, watch how much water you are removing from your pond!! It works so well sucking up the “yuk” that one can easily forget how much water is also being removed! That is the voice of experience talking!!



**We always have snakes around my pond, except in the winter. Where do they go?** Asked by Dylan of Garner IA

**A:** Ponds and lakes get plenty of visitors – including different species of snakes that linger around water. Some of the more common varieties that call the **northern**

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states home include the Black Rat Snake, Corn Snake, Garter Snake and the Northern Water Snake.

Water snakes live wherever there's water, like near lakes, ponds, marshes, streams, rivers and canals. During the spring, summer and fall, when the weather is warm, you probably see these snakes slithering in and around your pond and in the grassy fields, looking for food and for places to sun themselves. But during the winter, they disappear. Where do they go? They're holed up and hibernating.

## Summer Home, Winter Home

Snakes are ectothermic, which means they use the environment to regulate their body temperature. When it's warm, they're warm – and they ensure that by basking on rocks, stumps or brush in the full sunshine. In fair weather, rocks, aquatic plants, muskrat houses and beaver lodges are good places to find water snakes, which like to hide among the sticks and plant stems when they're not sunning themselves.

But when it's cold, they go on hiatus. These snakes are unable to generate their own internal body heat, so they rely on outside forces to keep their metabolisms churning. They need to overwinter in areas that will not freeze. The underground becomes their winter home, where they spend their time in temperature-stable burrows below the freezing line, and often share the space with other snakes.

## Preferred Diet

In the spring, summer and fall, these slithering, mostly harmless critters are active day and night. During the day, water snakes hunt among plants at the water's edge, looking for small fish, frogs, worms,

leeches, crayfish, salamanders, young turtles, and small birds and mammals. At night, they concentrate on minnows and other small fish sleeping in shallow water.

When the cold weather sets in; however, snakes go on a season-long diet. Their metabolism slows way down. Food supplies, like frogs and toads, dwindle. If snakes have undigested food in their bellies when they go into hibernation, they can die.

## Friends and Foes

Water snakes have many predators, including birds, raccoons, opossums, foxes, snapping turtles, bullfrogs and other snakes. Humans who mistake the harmless snake varieties for dangerous ones, like Copperheads and Water Moccasins, can affect the population, too.

For the most part, these guys are our friends. They may eat some fish and frogs and hunt some of the indigenous wildlife, but they also do damage to the rodent population – which everyone can appreciate. If you see a snake on your property and you're not sure if it's a safe or dangerous variety, contact your local university extension office and describe the snake's size, color, scale pattern and where you found it. Never kill a snake without good reason, because they are important to our environment



**We've decided to shut down the pond this winter. Do we just need to take out the pump and filter?** Asked by

Tina od DuBois PA

**A:** Oh, if it were only that easy. Even though you plan to shut down the pond for the season, you still need to complete some

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winterizing chores. Put on your [Aqua Gloves™](#) and hip waders. Here is your step-by-step guide for closing down shop and storing pond equipment for the winter.

## Step 1: Prepare for Shutdown

Do you have a leaf-collecting net covering your pond? Once the colorful foliage has stopped falling, remove the net, shake off the leaves and store it until next fall. If you leave it on the pond, heavy snowfall and ice could collect on it and weigh it down—possibly endangering your fish. Then grab your gear for cleanup.

**Step 2: Disconnect Filters and Pumps, Lower Water Level** Next, protect your pumps, filters, and hardware from the freezing temperatures. Disconnect the plumbing and drain the water from the tubing to prevent them from freezing, expanding and cracking. If your filtration system has a built-in ultraviolet filter or if you have a UV clarifier, disconnect it and take it indoors to prevent ice damage. Remove your pump and store it in a bucket of water to keep the seals moist so they don't dry out and crack. And lower the pond water level below the opening of the skimmer, but leave about 1/3 of water in the skimmer box to protect it from expanding and cracking during freezing temperatures.

## Step 3: Clean Filters and Media

Natural bacteria that have been thriving in your pond will become dormant and die through the winter, so you can remove your filter media and store it indoors for safekeeping. Be sure to wash the pads or BioBalls with a strong stream of water while they're still wet; it's much easier to clean

UVs and media when they're wet versus trying to scrub off dried debris in the spring.

## Step 4: Trim Back Aquatic Plants and Remove Excess Debris

Do you have plants in your pond? Tropical varieties—like tropical lilies—must be removed and stored inside if you hope to keep them thriving until spring. Hardy varieties can stay in the pond; take some time to trim away dead or dying foliage after the first frost.

## Step 5: Remove Excess Debris

While you're at it, pull out your pond vacuum or hand net and dig up as much detritus as possible. The less rotting debris in the pond, the more available oxygen for fish.

## Step 6: Install De-Icer and Aeration

Your fish will take a winter nap through the cold season, but they'll still need oxygen to survive. If you live in an area that freezes, be sure to install a de-icer, aeration or both (as we feature in the [PondAir™ & Thermo-Pond De-Icer Combo](#)) to help maintain a hole in the ice. That will allow the toxic gases to vent and oxygen to enter while circulating the water.

## Step 7: Switch to Wheatgerm Fish Food

If you haven't already switched to wheatgerm fish food, do so now. Our [Spring and Fall Fish Food](#) is easier for your finned pals to digest—which is what they need when temperatures start to fall. As the water reaches 40 to 50 degrees F, slow down and stop feeding them for winter. Remember that with no filtration system running, any waste they produce won't be sufficiently removed.

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## Step 8: Add Seasonal Defense

Finally, if temperatures still permit, continue to add natural bacteria designed for cooler temperatures, like **Seasonal Defense®**. The little microbes will continue to break down organic waste that wasn't easily cleaned from the pond.

As you prepare to shut your pond down for the winter, take time to check off these chores. It'll make next year's spring pond season one to look forward to! For a more details or to watch a step-by-step video view our **Learning Center**.



## I know my fish will go to the bottom of the pond for the winter, but do I need to do anything for turtles?

Asked by Virginia oof Brillion WI

**A:** Turtles are smart critters. Unless your terrapins are terrarium-dwellers that aren't accustomed to the great outdoors, they instinctively know what to do to prepare for winter. They take their cues from Mother Nature—so you can simply let them do their thing! Read on to learn more.

## Winter Home-Sweet-Home

When air and water temperatures start to chill and their food source become scarce, turtles will slow their metabolisms and look for a place to hole up for the winter. Different types of turtles prefer different types of winter homes; water-loving turtles will swim to the bottom of the pond while land-based turtles, like a box turtle, will burrow in the dirt or mud at or near the pond surface, where they'll stay warm and cozy.

## Metabolism Changes

Just like fish, turtles will stop eating as their metabolism naturally slows to a cold-weather crawl. They'll start to hibernate—or brumate, as termed in herpetology—when they'll require very little oxygen, their heart rate will slow to just a few beats per minute and they'll sleep the winter away, only to wake up in the spring when temperatures increase again.

## Provide a Welcoming Environment

Though turtles don't need a lot of oxygen while they're hibernating, they do appreciate a healthy pond with clean, O<sub>2</sub>-infused water. Provide that to them by completing your fall-maintenance chores, like cleaning up dead or dying debris, and keeping your **aeration system** running over the winter. That moving, oxygenated water will ensure your shelled pond pals will get a good winter's sleep.

**Please support these businesses who have agreed to give our members a discount at their stores**

An advertisement for Bonnie's Greenhouse. The background is a soft-focus image of white daisies with yellow centers. On the left, there is a white text box with the following information:

Bonnie's Greenhouse  
Sandra & Johnny Killough  
5198 Orchard Lane  
Waco, Texas 76705  
254-799-7909  
254-799-5411 Fax  
sandrakillough@hotmail.com  
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