

Just a Splash

Bubbling fountains bring light and life to the garden. You can install one as a Saturday project—and enjoy it for years to come.



This photo: A pretty fountain becomes the center of attention in a flowerbed. Maintenance is easy: Top up the reservoir once or twice a week with a hose. If necessary, use a scrub brush to remove algae on the urn, or use a few drops of pet- and wildlife-safe algicide once a week.

To transform the mood of a garden, just add water. A bubbling fountain catches the light and seizes the imagination, and its soothing, gentle splash takes you miles away from the demands of the bustling world—without leaving your own backyard.

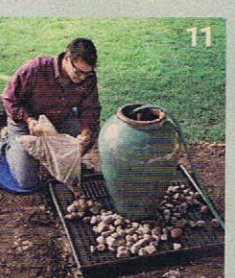
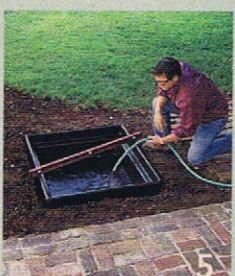
“They’re beautiful, and they are so easy,” says Kristopher Dabner, a garden designer who has installed handsome bubblers in gardens of every style in Kansas City. “You have all the advantages of a water garden, with almost no maintenance.”

An attractive fountain of any style brings a garden mysteriously to life. Here, a fountain in a classic urn bubbles gently, with the water welling over the rim. Installing one is an easy weekend project, Dabner says: Pick up the supplies, dig a hole, put the parts together, and switch on the pump to set the water flowing.

Dabner buys his fountain supplies from a water-garden shop. “You can’t really get everything you need from a hardware store,” he says. He likes to use big urns, 30 inches tall, and places them on a reservoir considerably larger than the footprint of the urn. Water-garden supply shops sell durable pumps and fittings and can recommend an appropriate-size pump. Bubbling fountains require electricity, so pick a spot fairly close to an outdoor outlet. Fountains make a great impression in the front yard, along the front walk, or next to a porch. They also have dramatic impact just inside a garden gate.

A garden tends to focus itself around a fountain. Ornamental grasses respond to the wind and change with the seasons; they look very natural near a shimmering water feature. Long-blooming perennials go with the grasses: Phlox, astilbe, coneflowers, sunny yellow coreopsis, black-eyed Susans, Shasta daisies, and Russian sage all have bright flowers and need no pampering. Liriope, creeping Jenny, or a groundcover sedum will soften the edge around the reservoir without compromising your view of the fountain.

“Planting around the fountain after you’re finished is fun, and you can do it any way you like,” Dabner says. “Keep it simple with boxwoods, or get fancy with lots of flowers.” One further accessory for a fountain: You’ll need a couple of comfortable garden chairs—for enjoying the sights and sounds.



STEP BY STEP

1. To make a bubbling fountain, you'll need an urn, a reservoir, a pump, various connectors, and a copper standpipe. Cinder blocks support the urn in the basin, and a sturdy grate on top of the cinder blocks distributes the weight. A screen of plastic mesh keeps the basin from filling with debris, and a layer of rocks hides the mesh. The water-garden supply shop drilled a 1½-inch hole in the urn for the standpipe. The 35-watt, 350-gallon-per-hour submersible pump cost about \$75. The reservoir for this project is 45 inches square.
2. Dig a basin at least 16 inches deep, and spread sand in the bottom of the hole.
3. Smooth the sand with the back of a rake.
4. Place the reservoir in the hole.
5. The top of the reservoir should be just at or slightly above the level of the surrounding soil, and it must sit perfectly level. Fill the reservoir two-thirds full of water.
6. Fill around the outside of the basin with more sand, and water it in to make a snug fit.
7. Arrange the cinder blocks in the reservoir so they will support the urn, and place the grate on top. It will rest on the lip of the reservoir and on the cinder blocks. Note the trap door, where the pump will be inserted.
8. A copper standpipe, secured to the hole in the bottom of the urn with a plastic tank fitting, rises all the way to the lip of the urn. A fitting called a hose barb attaches to the tank fitting at the bottom of the pipe. Clamp a rubber hose onto the barb.
9. The other end of the hose will be clamped to the submersible pump.
10. Fit the plastic mesh on top of the reservoir. Thread the hose through the hole in the grate, and stand the urn up on the grate.
11. Reach into the reservoir for the end of the hose, pull it out through the trap door, and attach the hose to the barb on the pump. Place the pump in the reservoir.
12. Fill the urn with water, and cover the grate with rocks.
12. Plug in the pump.