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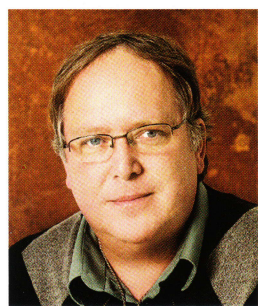
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# The neighborhood pond

Humble purpose, lofty expectations



JANELLE SOU ROBERTS

Pine Valley Country Club faces the same pond management challenges as its suburban residential neighbors.

Each season, I receive numerous phone calls from members of neighborhood associations asking for advice on how to manage their ponds. As it turns out, curtailing geese and keeping the pond free of weeds can be a costly enterprise. Thinking more sustainably can result in reduced costs and improved water quality.

The main purpose of retention ponds installed in and around subdivisions is to “mitigate” water runoff—giving the water a place to go—instead of running directly into storm drains and sewers. Many retention ponds are shallow compared to small lakes or ponds designed for fishing and recreation. Ponds less than 15 feet in depth have more problems with weeds and

algae because of the light penetration that encourages weed growth.

Countless retention ponds are surrounded by acres of turf, “fed” each year from neighborhood lawns with quick-release high nitrogen and phosphorous fertilizer, which can contribute to weed and algae growth.

Many folks have unrealistic expectations for the association pond. Many times, folks want a pond filled with fish, devoid of any vegetation, surrounded by turfgrass, with no erosion—and no geese. These expectations are almost impossible to fulfill, and if they are fulfilled, they require large inputs of pesticides and money.

Thinking more sustainably involves

everyone in the neighborhood having realistic expectations and working together for a cleaner, healthier pond. Following are some suggestions for a more sustainable retention pond.

- Use slow-release fertilizers in the spring. Avoid applying fertilizer right before raging thunderstorms, and avoid applying fertilizers within 15-20 feet of the pond. Use a low or no-phosphorous fertilizer periodically if soil tests show adequate amounts of phosphorous.
- Get a bubbler to circulate water in the pond. Research shows that fountains are pretty, but not very effective. Many bubbler-type aerators are available through pond supply companies.
- Use buffer strips around the pond



to slow down erosion and filter runoff. Buffer strips can also help deter geese from entering lawn areas. These vegetative strips can be of varying widths and heights, depending on the plant species that are used. Companies in our area specialize in the installation of buffer strips. Installing them isn't cheap, but these strips can save money in the long run and improve the water quality in the pond.

- Mechanical harvesting of pond weeds is a sustainable way to help with weed control. The raked weeds (make sure no herbicides have been used in the pond recently) can be allowed to dry. Then they can be used as a mulch/fertilizer in a vegetable or flower garden.

- Sometimes, regardless of your practices, herbicides must be used to control pond weeds. If so, it is vital to hire a licensed and insured commercial applicator (category 5) to spray the pond.

Research-based Purdue publications related to ponds and aquatic weed management are available at <http://www.ces.purdue.edu/extmedia/botany.htm> and at our Allen County Extension office. Let's all be more sustainable so our ponds have cleaner water and require fewer inputs—and less money—to maintain. ■



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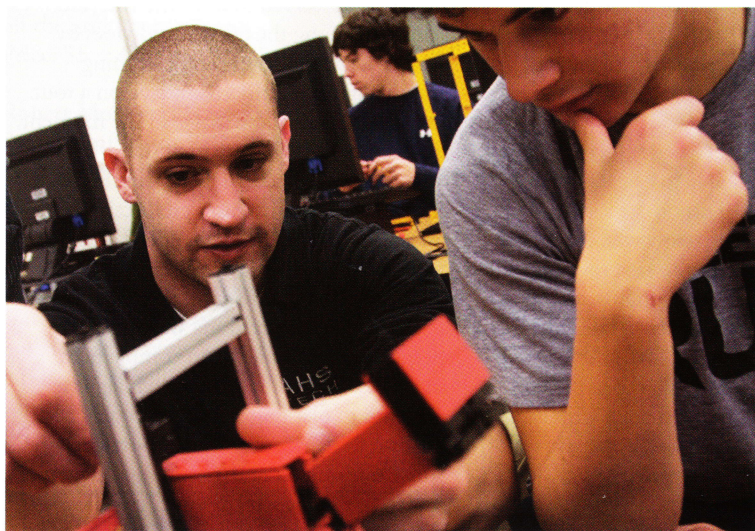
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William (left) teaches at Auburn High School in New York and is pursuing a Ball State master's degree in technology education.

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