

THE MIRROR *Weekend Section*



In addition to landscaping and water garden options, Oak Park is a full-service garden center, offering approximately 10,000 potted perennials at any time. In addition to flowers, plants and trees, the store features garden furniture and accents.



Oak Park Landscaping and Water Garden Center, located at 3131 Wilkins Rd. in Swanton, opened its doors 24 years ago. Owner Richard Giddens started the business as a landscaping company, but expanded to a full-service garden center.

Oak Park Offers Tools, Skills To Create Unique Gardens

BY KERRI RALLS

MIRROR REPORTER

What started 33 years ago as a landscaping company today is a full-service lawn and garden center, offering the area's only water garden options.

Oak Park Landscape and Water Garden Center, in Swanton, started out in "nothing more than a horse barn," said owner Richard Giddens.

Giddens said he started his landscaping business using a barn, located at Airport Highway and SR 295, as a storage facility for upcoming jobs.

"People would see (the plants) and stop to ask to buy (them)," Giddens said.

So, Giddens and his wife Diane created a garden center there 24 years ago.

"We still do some landscaping," Giddens said, "but our mainstay is the garden center."

Today, the garden center grows and sells more perennials than any other area center, Giddens said.

"We have about 10,000 potted perennials at any one time," he said.

Oak Park sells flowers, plants, trees, plant food, gardening tools, garden ornaments and virtually any other garden item.

The full-service garden center even hosts gardening and landscape classes to teach customers the necessary skills.

Though it offers a wide variety of garden and landscape items, Oak Park's most unique draw is the water gardens.

"The water garden is really what makes us a destination," said Giddens, who noted that people drive as far as 100 miles to visit Oak Park.

A water garden features



Water gardens, like this one, are a unique draw to Oak Park Landscaping and Water Garden Center. These gardens feature ponds, fountains and waterfalls complemented with landscaping to add to any backyard or commercial property. Oak Park offers weekly classes to teach design and building principles to create the gardens.

some type pond, waterfall or running water surrounded by landscaping. A water garden has fish.

Also, customers can choose to build a water feature, which is similar to a water garden, but does not contain any fish.

"We made the move to the water gardens before anyone knew anything about it," Giddens said.

According to Giddens, the garden center works with residential and commercial gardens that are used for recreation, drinking and aesthetic purposes.

Giddens and company can service an existing pond or create an entirely new design.

Through a few books and

a lot of trial and error, Giddens and his staff have developed efficient, effective and aesthetically pleasing ways to create water gardens.

Oak Park will even design the garden for you free of charge.

Customers fill out questionnaires concerning their available space and what type of garden they like, then Oak Park staff members design the garden.

"We encourage, no matter what the project is, to start out with dimensions and pictures," Giddens said.

Giddens said it's hard for many people to picture what the project will look like once complete.

So, the staff at Oak Park will give customers a design,

based on their stated interests and likes.

"We can explain what it's going to look like done (now) and years from now," Giddens said.

Then, they will work with customers to take that design from the paper to the landscape.

They have created a variety of different types of gardens, including Japanese gardens, formal gardens and natural gardens.

Water garden classes run every Sunday for those who like to take a do-it-yourself approach.

Giddens and his staff teach the principles and basics of organizing and building a water garden based on their years of experience.

The soil and water conditions in our area need to be addressed specifically.

"It's not just digging a hole and filling it with water," he said.

Giddens recommends the class, and everyone who attends will receive a 15 percent discount on supplies.

For those who like the idea, but don't want a whole pond in their yard, Giddens recommends a "waterless" water garden.

These gardens feature flowing water, but no pool where the water gathers.

The water gardens could cost anywhere from \$300 to several thousand dollars, Giddens said. The price depends on how elaborate the garden will be.

There's no need to worry about the water once the water garden is installed, either.

"We've developed filtration systems and water treatments to make pond-keeping easier," Giddens said.

Oak Park sells and explains water treatment products to keep the gardens safe and clean.

The best thing about the water garden is the surprising speed with which it can be put together.

Once you've taken the class, got your design and gathered the materials, you're close to a beautiful water garden.

"It's a good weekend project," Giddens said.

To learn more about water gardens or any other of Oak Park's services, call (419) 825-1438, or visit www.oak-parkwatergarden.com.

Oak Park is open Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.