

Breaking the Chain

Plant pockets make ponds look more natural, while still stopping soil erosion



Featured in this article:
Bob Dews
 Extreme Pools

Dews, a pond designer and subcontractor, owns Extreme Pools in Cashiers, N.C. He began his career as a designer five years ago when he built his first waterfeature at the Laurel Wood Mountain Inn, which he owns. He also teaches seminars for the North Carolina Landscape Architects Association and Pondapalooza.

By **Rukshan Mistry-Sheasby**
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Many professionals call it the necklace effect — a chain of rocks butted one against the other around a pond, with no plants to soften the look. Whatever you call this feature, Bob Dews, owner of Extreme Pools, believes it detracts from a pond's authenticity.

"What I strive to do, and what I have been recognized for, is creating natural-looking ponds," Dews says. "Ponds do not have beads of rocks surrounding them, but they do have plants."

Still, when he started designing ponds, Dews soon discovered that most builders and designers avoid placing plants on the pond's edge for fear of introducing soil into the water.

Dews figured out a way to avoid that problem, as well as the contrived and unnatural-looking necklace effect, with something he calls *plant pockets*.

He creates the pockets with geotextile fabric, which is permeable to water but not to soil. Dews generally makes the pockets 4 to 5 inches deep, with lengths of up to 3 feet.

This leaves a pliable container from which soil can't escape, but plants can grow. "We use a lot of annuals like iris or hosta in the pockets — anything that loves wet soil," Dews says.

The pockets typically sit directly along the pond's perimeter and contain the plants and soil.

Dews decides where to place the pockets by studying water movement in the pond. "In areas where the water remains motionless, I know that I can put a plant pocket without worrying about soil erosion," he says. "Usually [plant pockets] work

best on the perimeter, but they can be placed in the middle of a pond, depending on the water flow."

Designers and builders can use plant pockets to break up the necklace effect on existing liner ponds. When you pluck a rock out, the dirt underneath is compacted and the rubber pond lining remains in place, says Dews. A plant pocket can easily fill this space. Plants also can be pulled out of the pocket and replaced as often as necessary.



A plant pocket can be installed above the water level or below to hold aquatic plants (above). Plant pockets allow foliage to intermingle with rocks for an authentic look (below).



Photos courtesy of Extreme Pools

In five years, Dews has pocketed much recognition for his unique design — and he says he has never had to replace any of his creations.