

HOW-TO Build A Water Illusion™ Water Feature

“Honey, what are we going to do with that corner?” When was the last time you looked at an empty corner or spot on the back porch or front entrance of your home? We all have those “dead-spots” in or around our homes that we know need attention yet somehow we can’t figure out what to do with them. A very popular solution in the last few years has been to create a container garden. You take a large pot and put a few plants of different colors, textures and heights and VIOLA! You have just created a container garden. What if you could also add sound and movement to that “spot”? If this sounds interesting to you then WELCOME to the world of container water gardening and water features known as [Water Illusions™](#)!

Water Illusions™ consist of stand-alone water features such as [fountains](#) and [container water gardening](#) have been around since the “beginning of time” but another version (or evolution) of these water features has been gaining exponential popularity since the turn of the century (early 2000’s). You might have recently seen them advertised and being described as pondless, disappearing, vanishing, [NO-Pond™ Waterfalls](#) or [NO-Pond™ Water Features](#). The concept is to have the movement and sound of water without a basin or open pool of water visually exposed. Usually this is achieved by having the water from a waterfall or a decorative pot overflow and has the water percolate through gravel and then be re-circulated via an underground basin and a pump. Some reasons that this type of water feature is so popular is the minimum time required to maintain in comparison to a water garden or koi pond and also the liability of having a standing body of water is greatly reduced if not removed altogether.

When deciding to install a water illusion water feature there are a few things to take into consideration such as location, size, type and electric requirements. Water Illusion™ water features such as pondless disappearing [NO-Pond™ Waterfalls](#) & [NO-Pond™ Water Features](#) are now becoming the main feature in a garden area even though they were once only thought of as a solution for an area with limited space. For concrete balconies, patio decks or indoor areas [container water features](#) are a great choice as they do not require digging and are available in smaller sizes.

Container water features and fountains are the easiest stand-alone water features as most are what we refer to as “plug-n-play.” To install most fountains all you have to do is level the area where it is to be installed, place or stack the fountain, install the pump and add water. With a container water feature all that is required is the container (whiskey barrel, pot, tub, etc.), plants and water. Place the container in its location, arrange your plants inside the container and finish by installing a small submersible pump with a fountain head and adding water. I installed my first overflowing garden pot water illusion water feature back

in 2001 when ready to install kits we not available as they are today. I made my own "kit" which consisted of a plastic tub, stainless steel mesh for my pump vault, a pump, a tall decorative urn-style pot and some gravel. Today, almost seven years later, the type of equipment and methods we use to create these types of water features have changed yet the concept remains the same.

Once you decide where, what type and size of stand-alone water feature you will be installing you must make sure that you will be able to get electricity to the pump. Always check for any permit(s) that might be required when installing a new electrical outlet. Make sure that an all weather cover is used over the outlet. Once you have figured this out we can begin the installation of our pondless disappearing [NO-Pond™ Water Feature](#).

To begin, mark the area that will be dug and become the underground basin for the water feature. For this feature we dug the basin three feet deep and four feet in diameter. Once the basin is dug, place the .45 mil EPDM liner into the hole and remove as many wrinkles as possible. **(NOTE: Any remaining wrinkles will not be seen.)** Now install your [NO-Pond™ pump vault](#) into the basin area. The NO-Pond™ pump vault has a lid and is what houses the submersible pump inside the basin. The NO-Pond™ pump vault also makes it easy to have future access to the pump without having to tear down the complete basin area. The NO-Pond™ pump vault should sit to the side of the basin that is closest to the electrical outlet and be deep enough so that the lid is just one to two inches below ground level. Once the pump vault is in place, cut six inch drainage pipes into sections that are as long as the basin area. **(NOTE: When building larger stand-alone features with larger waterfalls or garden pots that might require a large volume of water and a deeper basin, I suggest the use of larger diameter drainage pipe at the bottom of the basin with the smaller six inch drainage pipe only used on the upper couple of feet.)** Now stack the sections of drainage pipe neatly inside the basin area all the way to ground level. **(NOTE: Using drainage pipe instead of filling the basin area with stones allow for more volume of water to be in the basin therefore lowering the frequency in which you will have to add water due to evaporation and any water splashing outside the basin area.)** After stacking the drainage pipe open the pump vault's lid and place the pump inside. Cut a four foot piece of 1 ½" PVC pipe and attach it to the pump, replace the lid and leave the excess length of the PVC pipe to stick out through the lid. Cut a piece of either shade cloth or weed matting that is larger than the basin by approximately two feet in all directions and place over the drainage pipes cutting a small opening to allow for the PVC pipe to extend out. Next roll the excess matting and tuck the excess into the inside perimeter edges of the basin. Tucking the matting to the inside edges will help keep the decorative gravel from falling in between the pipes. Now spread and cover the matting with decorative gravel at least one inch to two inches deep. Compact and level out the decorative gravel and the basin is now complete.

Next we'll install the garden pot onto the 1 ½" PVC pipe that is sticking through the gravel from the pump. First remove just enough of the decorative gravel from around the 1 ½ inch PVC pipe to be able to install a bulkhead fitting. Mark the PVC pipe as to leave the top of the bulkhead fitting level with the decorative gravel once installed onto the PVC pipe with a threaded adapter fitting on it. Now cut the PVC at your mark and prime and glue the threaded adapter fitting that is attached to the bulkhead fitting. Wait a few seconds and replace the decorative gravel back around the PVC pipe in order to give a flat and level area for the garden pot. Unscrew the top portion of the bulkhead fitting and use it as a template to mark the location and the size the hole that will be cut onto the bottom of your garden pot. Once marked cut a hole on the bottom of your garden pot using the proper tool for the type of pot you selected. **(NOTE: Using a resin or fiberglass garden pot will make it easier to cut a hole with a standard drill bit. Using a glazed or terracotta garden pot will require a special drill bit.)** Slide the garden pot over the PVC pipe and screw the top piece of the bulkhead fitting back onto the bottom piece. As an option you can attach a piece of PVC pipe onto the bulkhead fitting inside the garden pot that extends to just below the top of the pot to create a fountain effect to your overflowing garden pot.

Other options include low-voltage lighting both inside and outside of the overflowing garden pot along with landscaping the basin area with plants that tolerate a lot of water. Other complimentary garden pots should be used to create a larger visual feature.

Your imagination is the only limitation with what you can do or use when installing one of these stand-alone water features. Whether your pondless disappearing basin is used for a waterfall, an overflowing garden pot, a well pump, frog or turtle spitters, have fun and enjoy the soothing, relaxing and healing sounds of water.