



◀ John Christopher and his wife Judy (seen below) have raised koi for many years, even transporting them when they moved to Grants Pass from California.

▶ One of the ponds the Christophers built has a small cascading waterfall.



The joy of koi

John and Judy Christopher have spent many years raising the fancy, colorful fish

Grants Pass residents John and Judy Christopher aren't coy about loving koi. When the couple retired and moved to Grants Pass from northern California almost a decade ago, they brought with them a school of brilliantly colored ornamental carp fish, called koi.

Koi were first bred for color in Japan in the 1820s. By the 1900s, a number of color patterns had been established, most notably the red-and-white Kohaku. In 1914, when koi were exhibited in the annual exposition in Tokyo, interest in the fancy fish took off, and the hobby of keeping koi spread.

"I saw them and they were so beautiful," Judy Christopher said. "At first we hand fed them all the time. They have a lot of personality."

The Christophers started out with eight of the fish and gave them names such as Blue Eyes, Goldie and Nonami. When the couple moved to the historic 146-year-old Thomas and Hannah Croxton house on the corner of Evelyn Avenue and Washington Boulevard, they weren't about to leave their koi behind.

"It was a process," Christopher remembered of transporting the fish. "We got big, oversized tanks and put them in the back of



Landscape Design & Construction in Grants Pass to build a pond for their koi. The design includes a waterfall so the water stays in motion and won't freeze during cold winters.

Their collection has grown, primarily because one of the fish breeds every May. "It's unusual. They don't like to breed in captivity," Christopher said. "But every year, she lays eggs."

Christopher said most of the eggs are eaten by the other koi in the pond — the

pickup. We put two fish in each tub, and we had to stop every two hours for 20 minutes to aerate the water. They survived. We were all glad to get here."

The Christophers hired Harmony Gardens

fish are omnivorous. But a few manage to emerge from the rocks when they're about 5 inches long, ready to face the world.

The Frog Prince Water Gardens in Grants Pass sells koi in a large assortment of colors and sizes. The Christophers shop there for koi food, which comes in large sticks or high-protein pellets. They supplement the fishes' diets with the occasional worm. Richard Fogg, co-owner of The Frog Prince, said prices for koi range from \$10 to \$550 based on the size and grade of the fish.

Koi are known for their longevity. A famous scarlet koi called Hanako was owned by several individuals during her lifetime and purportedly was 226 years old when she died in 1977, based on examining one of her scales. But, Fogg said, most koi live for only about 30 to 55 years.

The Christophers' oldest koi are 19 and 20 years old.

"One of my granddaughters wants to take them someday when we make the move to a nursing home," Christopher said. "We'll have to see about that."

Christopher said taking care of koi requires a little work, but it's well worth it.

"They're special," she said. "They're not only beautiful, they are calming." **HG**

Caring for your koi

Koi fish are strong, but they require tender love and care to flourish and live long lives.

Here are some tips on koi care:

■ Koi can grow quite large, and it is recommended that their pond be no less than 1,000 gallons in volume. It also needs to be at least 3 feet deep.

■ Stock only a few fish to start, and add more as you gain experience and your pond ecologically matures.

■ Although the fish eat mosquitoes, plants and algae that are present in the pond, it is good to supplement their diets with commercial koi pellets.

■ Koi should be fed twice a day, though some fish fanatics believe one large feeding daily is sufficient.

■ In winter, koi go into hibernation as the temperature of the water drops. Frequency of feeding along with the amount of food given will need to be reduced. Koi will tend to remain in the deeper areas of the pond.

■ Once a pond is operational, maintenance is important. Daily, weekly, monthly, and seasonally, the pond will need to be inspected to make sure it is providing a safe and healthy environment for your koi. Neglecting to maintain the pond could lead equipment to malfunction, filters to clog and even result in the water draining out through tears in the pond liner.

■ Controlling bacteria levels in a pond is important to koi health. Bacteria is the main source of sickness in koi. There are a variety of chemicals and substances that can be used to make sure bacteria will not overrun the pond. Consult other koi owners or pet store workers to learn the best way to treat a pond based on the environment and climate.

■ Regularly remove any debris and leaves from the pond.

