



When you're away on vacation, it's nice not to worry about what's happening back home—including your koi pond. By preparing beforehand, you can relax knowing your koi will remain safe and healthy while you're away.

✓ Make A Feeding Plan

Depending on the season, koi can last several days without food as long as the pond has a healthy ecosystem with aquatic plants and a small amount of algae. Your fish won't get too hungry if your trip lasts only a few days. Underfeeding your koi is much safer than overfeeding.

Feeding koi extra before leaving is counterproductive and only helps satiate the fish for a short time. Overfed fish will produce an overabundance of waste. Plus, the leftover food will also break down and create biological matter that can quickly deteriorate the water quality in your pond.

If you will be out of town for a longer period, hire a fish sitter to maintain your regular feeding pattern. Because koi novices tend to overfeed, it's helpful to pre-portion the food into small bags for each feeding. Another option is installing an automatic feeder that will distribute food on a pre-determined schedule. Feeding blocks are a cheaper option, but they risk clogging your filters.

✓ Regulate Water Quality

Perform a 10-20% percent water change and test water for pH, ammonia, nitrite, and nitrate, especially if you will be gone awhile. Your water's pH should read between 7.0 and 7.5. Ammonia and nitrate levels should be close to 0, while nitrite levels should be below 60 ppm.

A pond's water levels drop most quickly in the summer as the heat accelerates evaporation. If you are gone two or more weeks, installing auto-fill valves inside a skimmer box can help maintain

proper water levels by automatically filling the pond if it drops to an unsafe level.

✓ Perform a Maintenance Check

Ensure your filtration system is properly operating before leaving. Inspect pumps and filters. Check for leaks, replace filter pads, and clear debris from your pond or skimmer. Performing routine maintenance will prevent a buildup of biological waste that could harm the nitrogen cycle in your pond.

✓ Increase Security

If you are gone for a substantial time, the local critters might notice the lack of activity and noise surrounding your home and feel more enticed to try their luck on a fish snack. If you currently rely on a single method of predator protection, consider adding a second modality. For example, pond netting can complement a motion-activated scarecrow or decoy.

✓ Keep the Status Quo

Don't make significant changes to your pond before your trip—this includes adding new fish, introducing new water treatments, or installing new features—for three to four weeks before leaving town. If you have waterfalls, it is best to leave them running to avoid a drop in oxygenation.

✓ Know Your Emergency Contacts

If someone is watching your pond, provide them with contact information for an aquatic veterinarian. If you don't already have one, an option is to use the "find a fish vet" feature on the website of the American Association of Fish Veterinarians or the World Aquatic Veterinary Medicine Association. Also, provide a phone number for a local pond technician service in case of a maintenance emergency.