

Pacific Northwest Koi Clubs Association comes to Post Falls



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Koi specialist and speaker at the 24th Annual Pacific Northwest Koi Clubs Association Convention Dick Benbow, left, describes how the color of a kohaku koi fish relates to quality Friday while convention attendees Larry Smith, Raeleen DeGrandpre and Sue Boydston look on.

Something's fishy

Koi keeping takes on life of its own

By BRIAN WALKER
Staff writer

POST FALLS — Val Kurita is hooked on koi.

"We love the color in our pond and you get attached to them just like a dog," the Bothell, Wash., man said of

the ornamental carp. "Our boys sit at the edge of our pond and the koi will come up to them and nibble on their heels and follow them around the pond.

"They can have quite the personality."

Kurita, who has started taking his fish to shows, is among the "koi keepers" looking for a competitive edge at the Pacific Northwest Koi Clubs Association annual convention at Red

Lion Templin's Hotel through Sunday.

These suckers can routinely be worth several thousand dollars and enthusiasts say a value in the tens of thousands is not unheard of, depending on their color, body shape, pattern and other factors.

"It's crazy," said keeper Kyle McNaught-Davis of Spokane, adding that he has spent \$1,000 on a fish.

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One of several pools of koi fish on display Friday at the 24th annual Pacific Northwest Koi Clubs Association Convention at the Red Lion Templin's Hotel in Post Falls.

FISHY

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"But you can really see the difference (in the fish that are worth more)."

That's why those at the convention listened intently to experts explain what to look for in a young koi and how to maintain their ponds. Koi that have been well cared for can live 35 to 50 years or longer.

"These fish rely on us," Kurita said, adding that he believes filtration is the most critical part of caring for koi. "We create their environment. We turn into plumbers whether we like it or not."

But vendor and former keeper Patti Magee said you can't let every speck that appears on a fish consume you.

"It can be a sickness just like other things we do, so you've got to keep it fun," she said. "If you worry about disease too much, the fun goes away."

Like many keepers, Kurita went casual on koi to start. Then he got the bug to start showing them at competitions.

"They're magnificent to watch," he said.

Dick Benbow, an expert on selecting young koi, said most people become mesmerized by the color pattern on the fish. But, if you're in it to pick a winner, you need to consider other factors.

If, for example, the hump behind the fish's head is pronounced, chances are it will grow into the shape of a football, which isn't much to show off, he said.

But some hump is good, Benbow said.

"The key is that you want something in between," he said.

Choosing young koi can be a double-edged sword.

"It takes five years to know how their genetics click," Benbow said. "But it's also possible that you can get a very high-class fish that's

very inexpensive."

Many clubs have buyers who travel to Japan, the koi capital, and bring the fish back to sell.

McNaught-Davis said there are "closet koi people," but most involved with the hobby enjoy sharing tips and clubs continue to grow.

The public is welcome to visit the koi displays and vendors at the convention.

"Most people don't make a dime, but it becomes an addiction," McNaught-Davis said.



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