Is Rain Bad for Your Pond? (And Why It Can Lead to Fish Loss)

Koi Carp · https://shirleyaquatics.co.uk/knowledge/is-rain-bad-for-your-pond-and-why-it-can-lead-to-fish-loss/

Is rain quietly affecting your pond more than you realise?
Have you ever lost a fish after a long, wet winter and couldn't explain why?

If so, you're not alone.

Every year—especially towards the end of winter—we speak to pond owners who say the same thing:

> "Everything's been fine for years… and then suddenly I've lost a fish."

Often it's a large koi. Sometimes one they've had for 10, 15, even 20 years.

And more often than not, prolonged rainfall is part of the story.

In this guide, you'll learn exactly how rain affects your pond water, why problems tend to show up in winter, and what simple steps you can take to prevent fish loss.

The Short Answer: Is Rain Bad for Your Pond?

Rain itself is not harmful.

But rainwater contains virtually no minerals, and over time, it dilutes the essential minerals your pond depends on to stay stable.

If this goes unnoticed, it can lead to:

- Low KH (carbonate hardness)
- Unstable or crashing pH
- Reduced filter performance

- Rising ammonia levels
- Fish stress, illness, or loss

Rain isn’t the problem—mineral dilution is.

How Rain Affects Your Pond Water Chemistry

Rainwater is essentially “empty” water.

Unlike tap water, it contains little to no:

- Calcium
- Magnesium
- Carbonates (KH)

So when rain enters your pond, it doesn’t improve water quality—it dilutes it.

A Simple Way to Think About It

Imagine making a glass of squash.

You add the squash, turn on the tap, and walk away.

Eventually, there’s no flavour left.

That’s exactly what prolonged rainfall does to your pond’s mineral content.

And when those minerals disappear, stability goes with them.

Why KH (Carbonate Hardness) Is Critical for Pond Health

There are very few “hard rules” in fishkeeping.

This is one of them:

Your pond must have enough KH to remain stable.

KH acts as your pond’s buffering system. It:

- Stabilises pH
- Supports beneficial filter bacteria
- Enables safe ammonia conversion

When KH drops too low, a chain reaction begins:

1. pH starts to fall (sometimes suddenly)
2. Beneficial bacteria struggle to function
3. Ammonia begins to rise
4. Fish become stressed—or worse

No KH = no effective filtration.

As a general rule, maintaining at least ~4°dKH helps keep your pond stable.

Why Pond Problems Often Appear After Winter Rain

Winter creates what we often call a “perfect storm” for pond instability.

During this time, you’re likely to have:

- Increased rainfall (more dilution)
- Less frequent water testing
- Fewer water changes
- Less topping up with mineral-rich tap water
- Organic debris breaking down and producing acids

All of this gradually reduces your KH—often without you noticing.

By early spring, your pond may be far less stable than it appears.

“But My Pond Has Always Been Fine…”

This is something we hear all the time—and it’s usually true.

But ponds don’t stay the same forever.

Over time:

- Fish grow and produce more waste
- Biological demand on your filter increases
- Weather patterns change
- Rainfall can be significantly higher some years

So while your pond may have been stable for years, one particularly wet winter can tip the balance.

Does Living in a Hard Water Area Help?

Yes—hard water does help.

But it doesn’t make you immune.

In summer, topping up with tap water adds minerals back into your pond.

In winter, rain often does the topping up instead—and rain contains no minerals.

So even in hard water areas, KH can still drop over time.

A Critical Mistake to Avoid

If you test your water and find:

- Low pH
- High ammonia

Do not raise the pH first.

Ammonia becomes more toxic as pH rises.

Instead:

1. Address ammonia safely
2. Restore KH levels
3. Then stabilise pH

Getting this wrong can make a bad situation worse very quickly.

How to Prevent Rain-Related Pond Problems

The good news is this is simple to manage once you know what to look for.

1. Test Your KH Regularly

Check your KH:

- Before winter
- During prolonged rainfall
- In early spring

Two minutes of testing can prevent major problems.

---

2. Take Action if KH Drops

If your KH falls below ~4°dKH:

- Add a suitable KH buffer
- Restore mineral levels gradually
- Avoid sudden changes

---

3. Stay Consistent

The biggest risk isn’t rain—it’s not knowing what your water is doing.

Consistency is what keeps your pond stable long-term.

Not Sure What Your KH Is Right Now?

If you’re unsure where your KH currently sits, it’s always better to check than guess.

If you’d like, email me your address and I’ll send you a KH test strip free of charge.

- Test your pond at home

- Send me the result if you want help
- I’ll talk you through what it means

No pressure. No obligation.

I’d always rather help you prevent a problem than deal with one after it’s happened.

Final Thoughts: Rain Isn’t the Problem—Ignoring It Is

If you’ve ever lost fish without a clear reason, it can be frustrating—and sometimes upsetting.

In many cases, slow changes caused by rainfall are part of the story.

Now you know:

- Rain dilutes essential minerals
- KH is what keeps your pond stable
- Winter is when risk quietly increases

If you keep an eye on KH, you’re already ahead of most pond owners.

Your Next Step

Test your KH.

Whether you use a strip, a liquid kit, or get help from us—what matters is knowing where you stand.

Because once you understand your water, preventing problems becomes simple.

Love Koi and Ponds? Why not check out our sister site Shirley Koi where we showcase our best Japanese Koi from some of the most noted breeders in Japan!