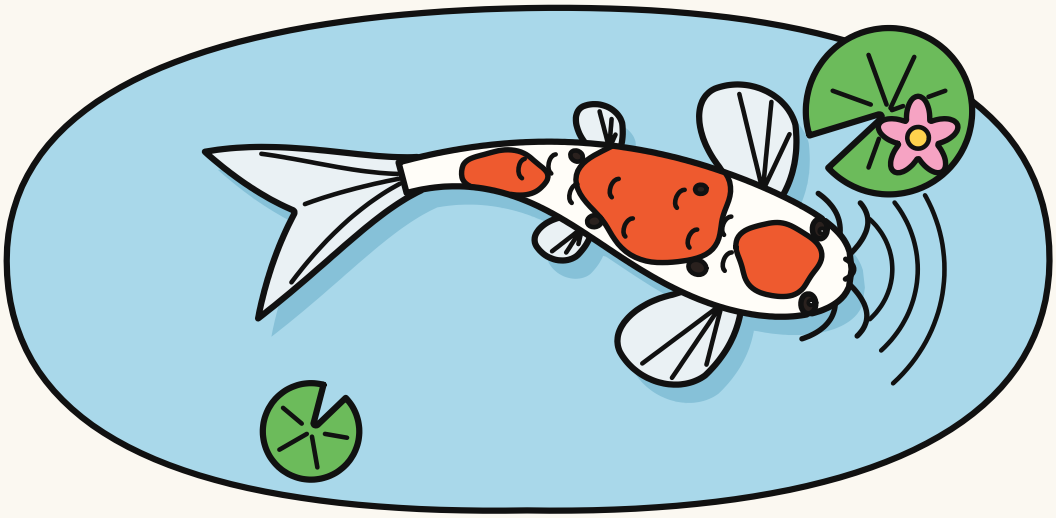
How to Draw a Koi Fish

12 easy steps for beginners



What you'll need

- A pencil
- An eraser
- A black fineliner
- Colored pencils
- Plain paper

How to use this guide

New lines for each step are shown in **blue**; lines you already drew are gray. Draw lightly first, then ink and erase near the end.

Read the full tutorial online →

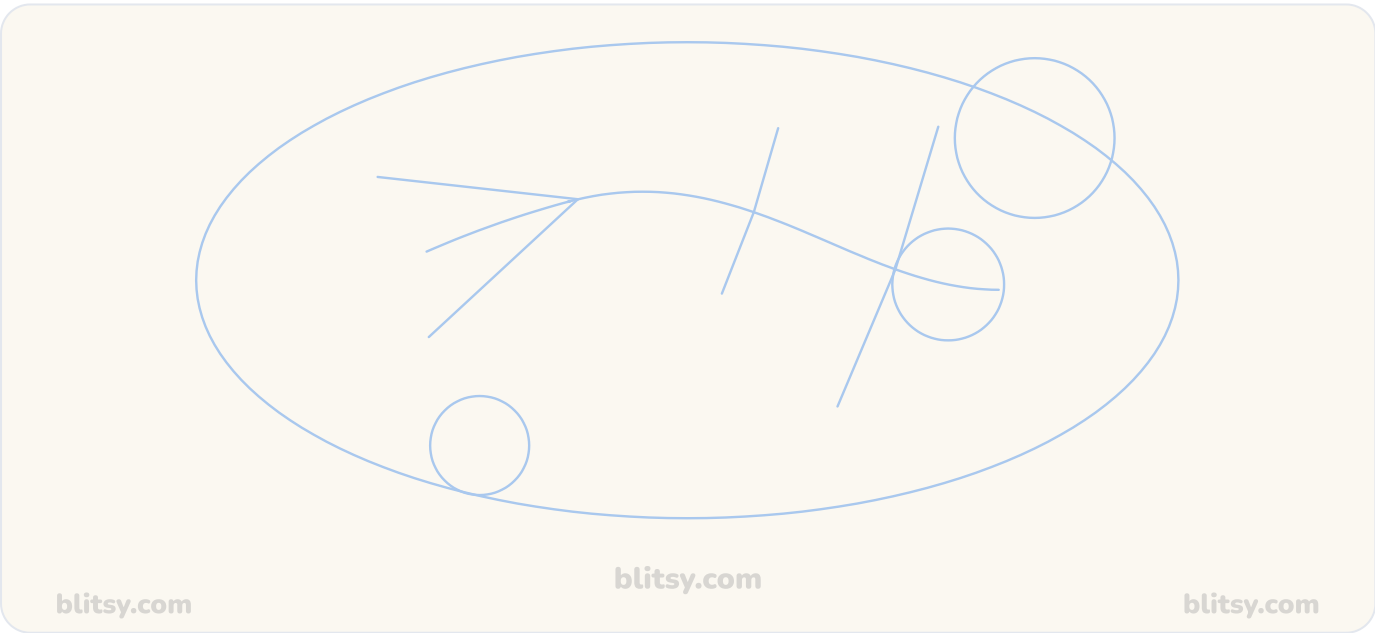
STEP 1 Draw a pond oval and an S-curve line



Sketch a wide, flat oval that fills most of the page. This is the pond. Inside it, draw one soft wavy line from left to right that rises a little in the middle and dips near the right end. That line is the koi's backbone, and every other shape hangs on it.

💡 **Tip:** Keep the wave gentle. A deep zigzag makes the fish look like it's wriggling in panic.

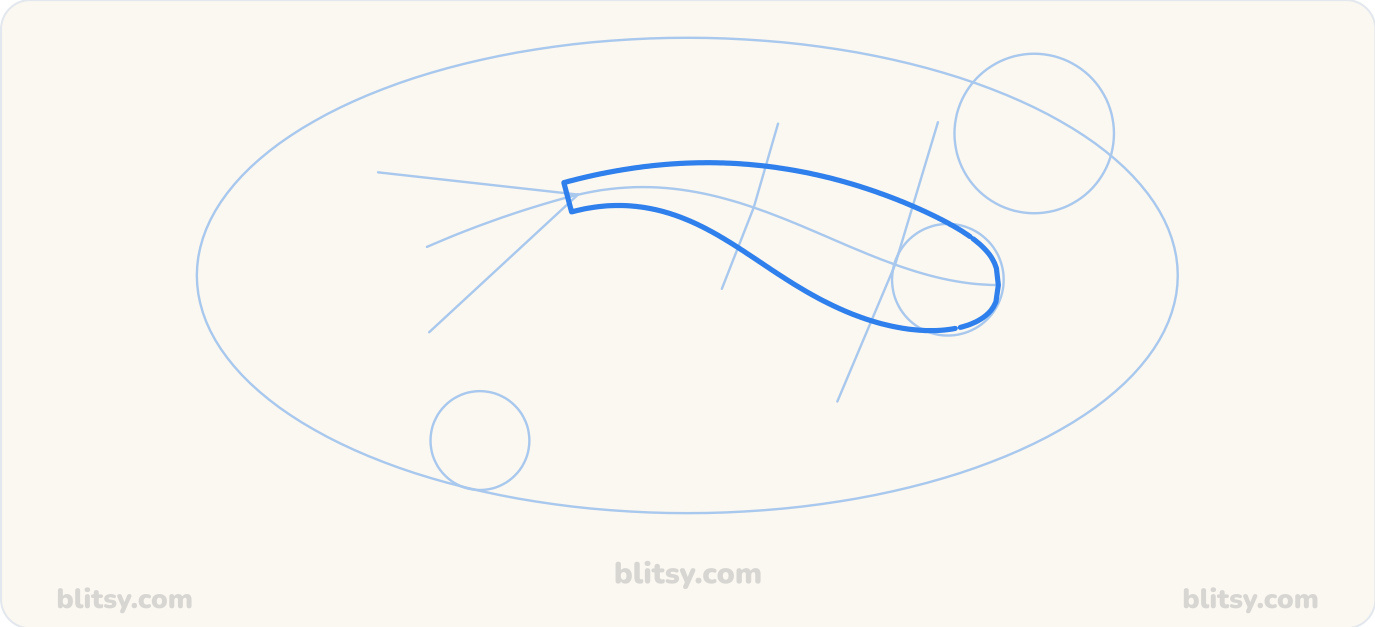
STEP 2 Add a head circle, tail lines and fin marks



At the right end of the curve, draw a circle for the head. At the left end, add two lines that open out like a V for the tail. Then put short slanted marks across the curve in two places: a longer one just behind the head for the front fins and a shorter one about halfway back. Finish with two circles where the lily pads will float.

💡 **Tip:** Place the big lily pad circle so it doesn't touch the head circle. The ripples need that space later.

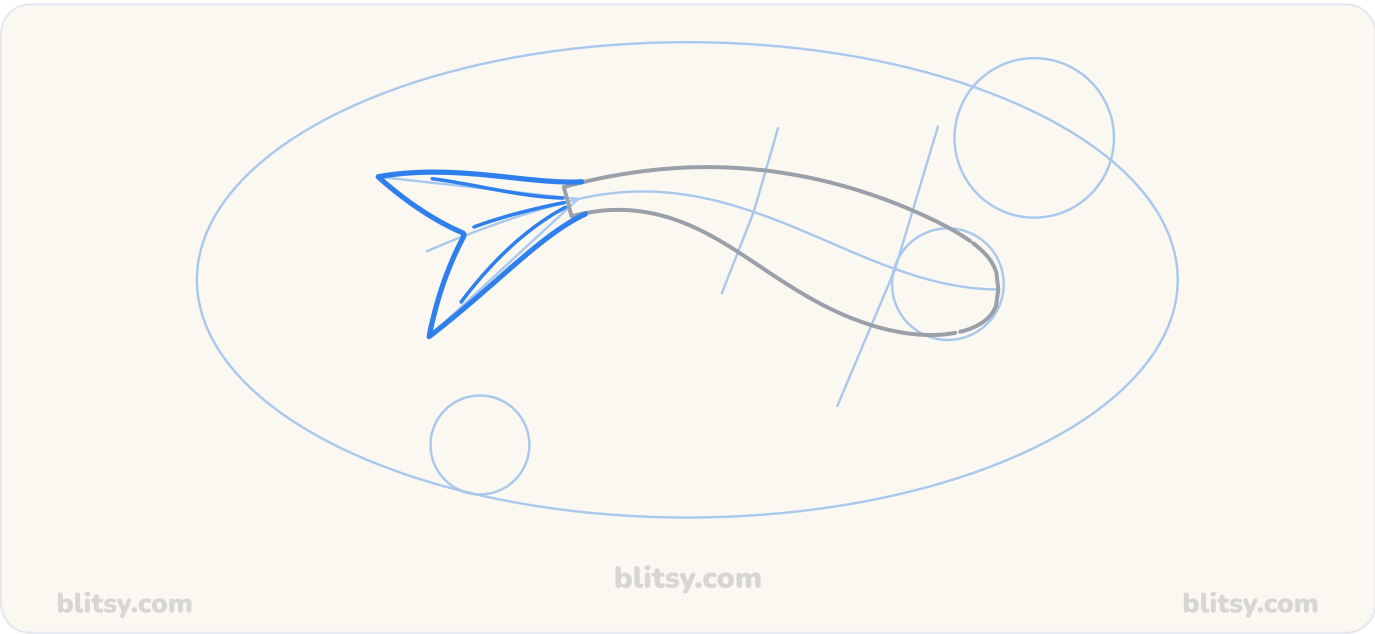
STEP 3 Draw the long curved body



Now wrap the body around the backbone. Start at the nose with a blunt, rounded tip, widen it through the head circle, and keep the widest part just behind the head. From there both sides slowly come closer together until they're only a finger apart at the tail end, where you close the body with a short line.

💡 **Tip:** Draw the top edge first, then the bottom edge, and check that both follow the same bend.

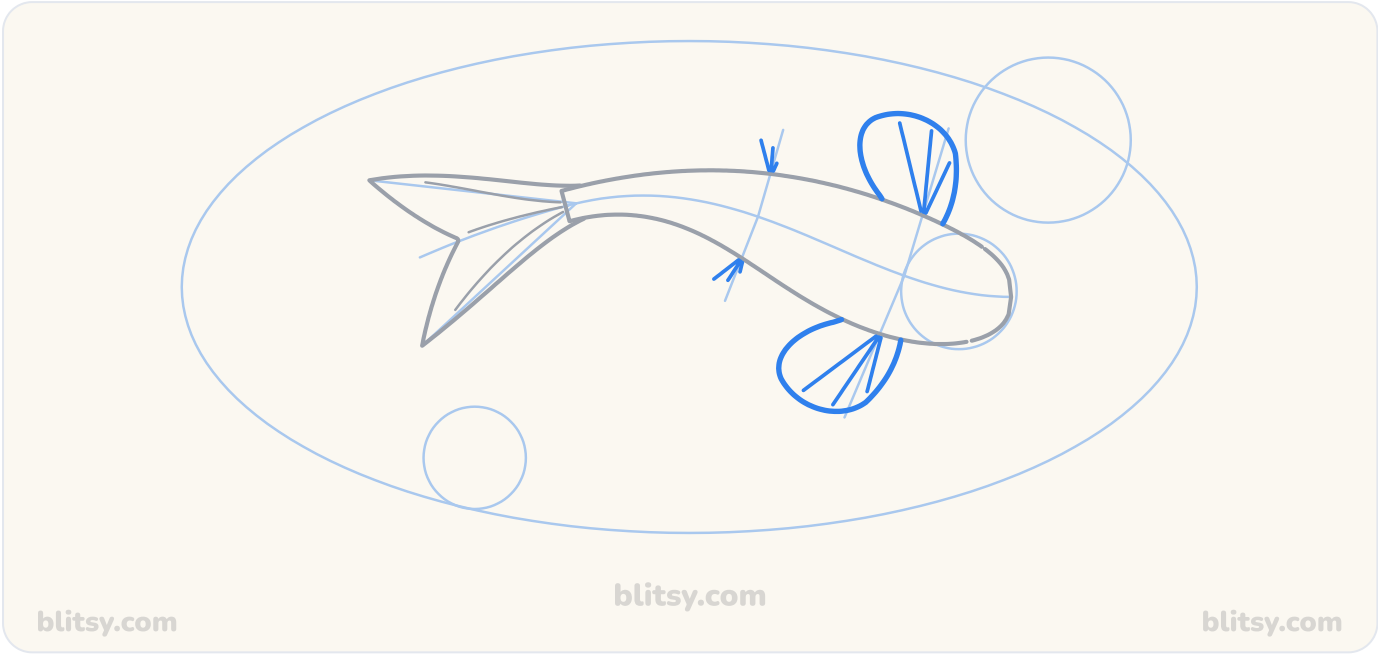
STEP 4 Add the flowing two-lobed tail



Use the V lines to draw the tail. Each lobe is a long, pointed leaf shape, and the two meet in a soft notch in the middle. I let the tail bend a little the opposite way from the body, because that tiny counter-curve is what makes the koi look like it's swimming. Draw three thin lines inside for the fin rays.

💡 **Tip:** Make the tail almost as long as the head and front fins together. Koi tails trail behind.

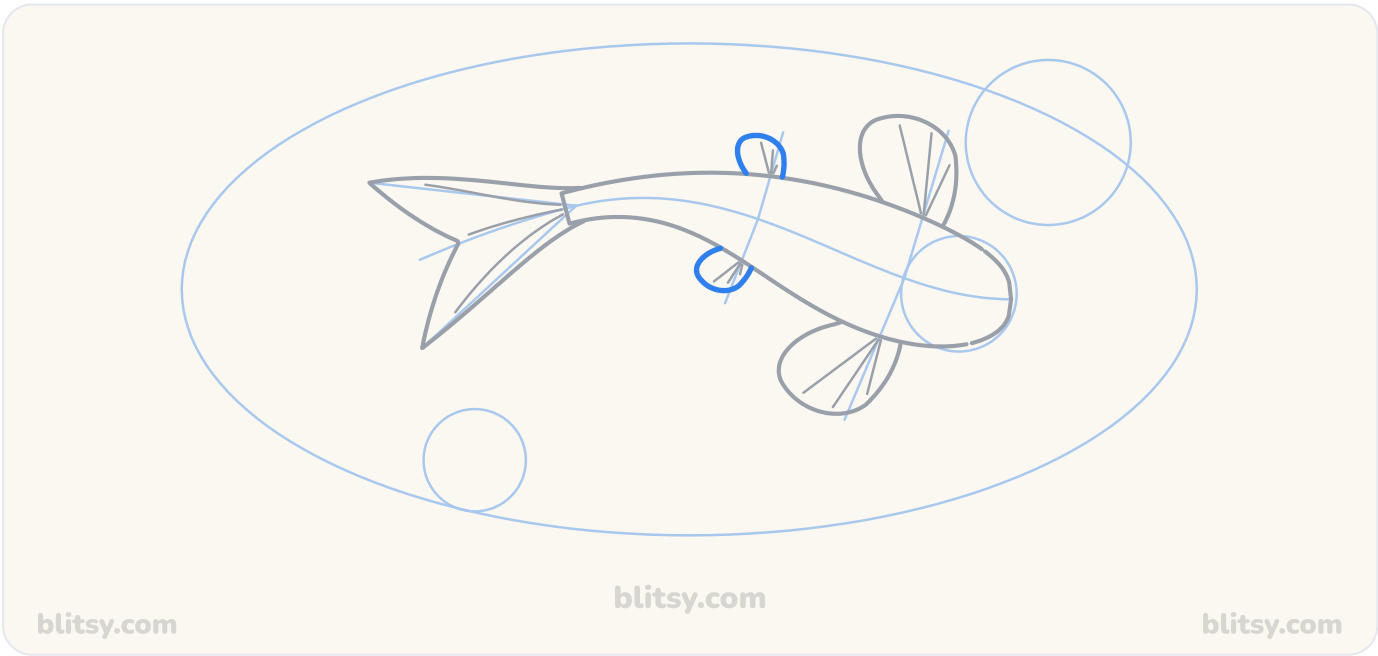
STEP 5 Draw two fan-shaped pectoral fins



On the front fin marks, draw one rounded fan on each side of the body. They start narrow where they tuck under the body and spread out wide, a bit like an open hand. Add three thin rays inside each fan, all starting from the body edge.

💡 **Tip:** Sweep the fins slightly backward. Fins that point straight out sideways look stiff.

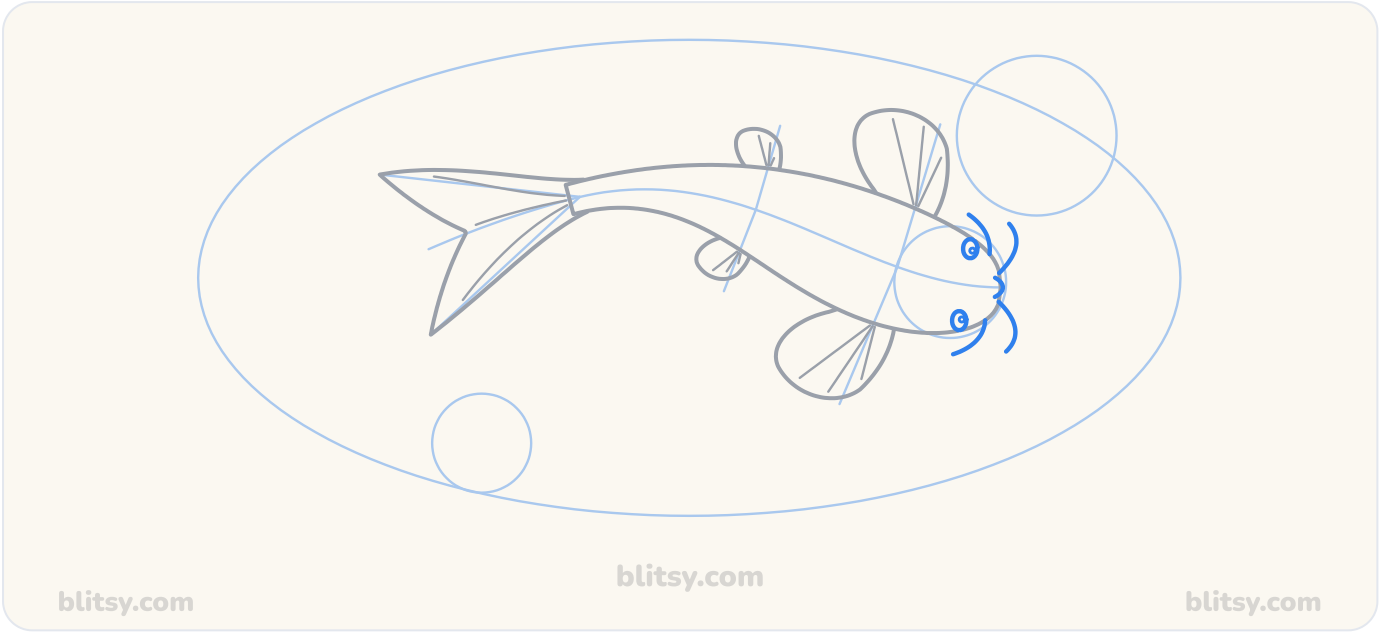
STEP 6 Add two small pelvic fins



On the second set of marks, halfway down the body, draw two much smaller fans. They are the same shape as the front fins, just about half the size. Small kids can skip these and the koi still reads clearly.

💡 **Tip:** Size matters here. If the back fins grow as big as the front ones, the fish looks like it has four wings.

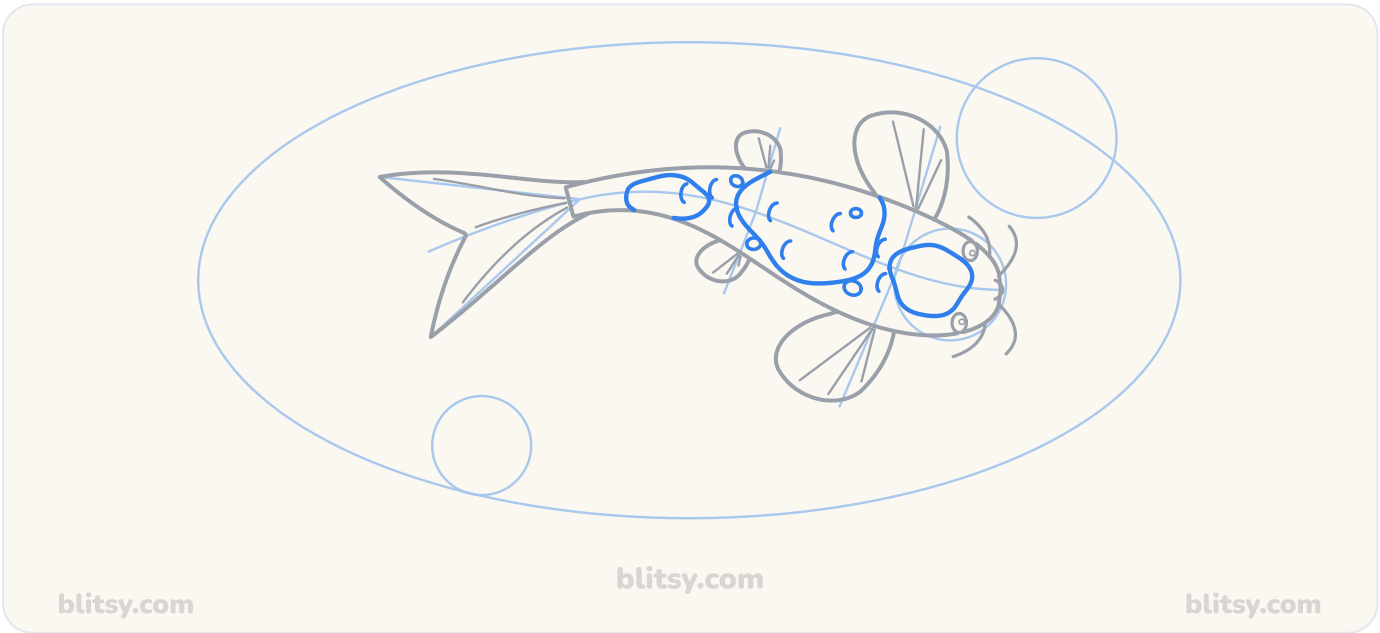
STEP 7 Draw the eyes, mouth and whiskers



From above, a koi's eyes sit right at the edges of the head, so draw a small oval on each side, close to the outline, with a tiny shine dot. Add a little curved mouth at the very tip of the nose. Then the barbels: two short curling whiskers on each side of the mouth, poking outward.

💡 **Tip:** Whiskers are what tell people this is a koi and not a goldfish, so don't leave them out.

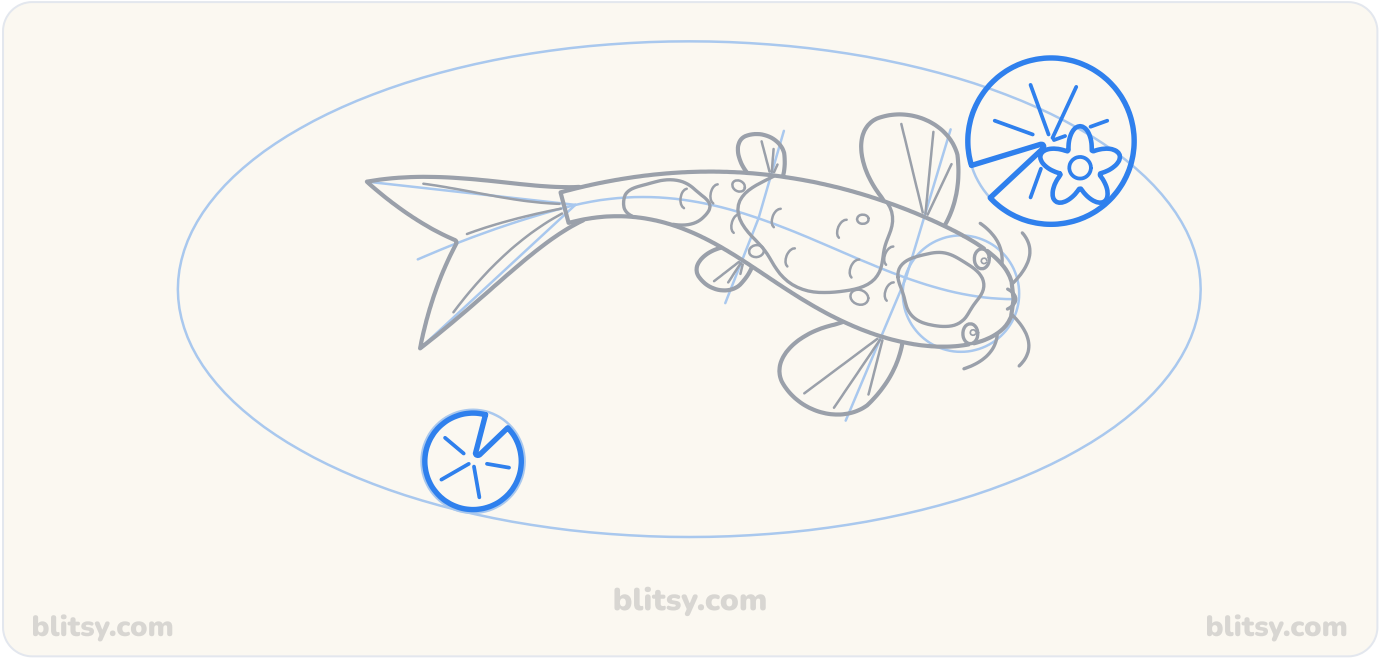
STEP 8 Add the patches, spots and scale marks



Kohaku koi have big orange red patches on a white body. Draw a rounded patch on top of the head between the eyes, a large wavy one across the middle of the back, and a smaller one near the tail. Add four small spots scattered along the sides. Finish with a few tiny curved marks for scales, like little bent smiles.

💡 **Tip:** Let one patch run right off the side of the body. Real koi patterns wrap around, so it looks more natural.

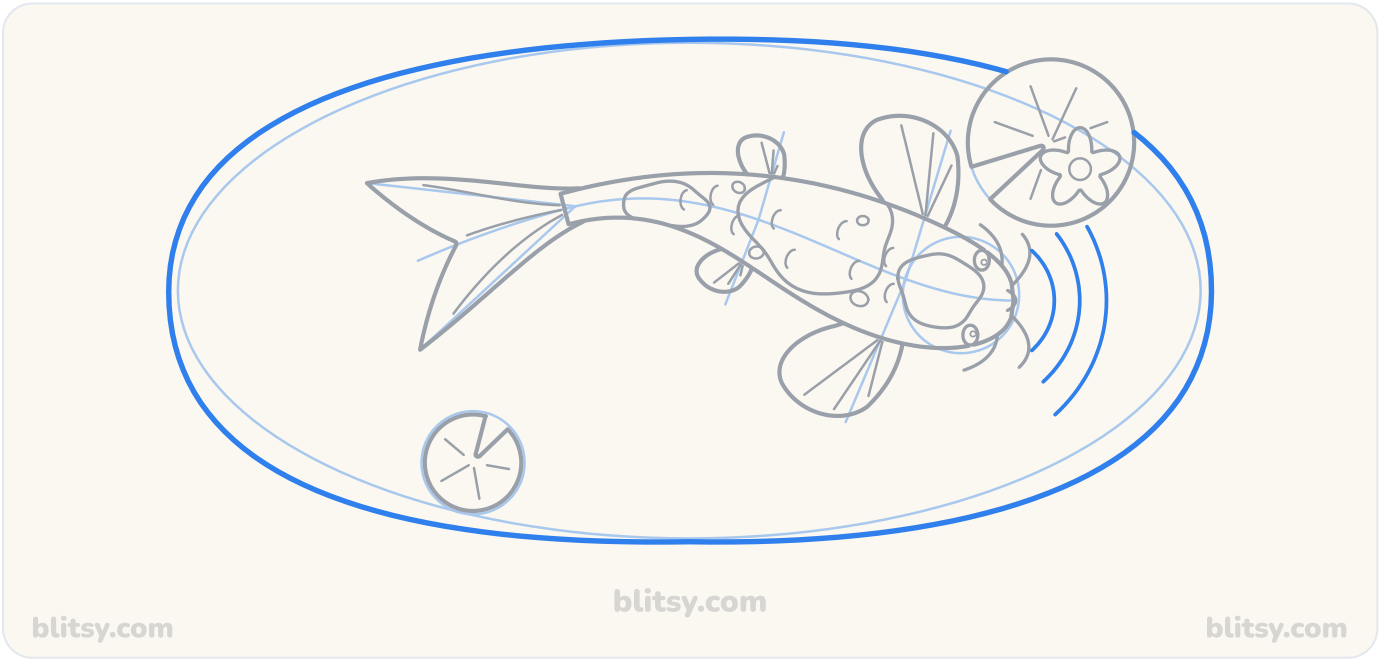
STEP 9 Draw lily pads and a flower



Turn each lily pad circle into a round leaf with a narrow wedge cut out of it, like a pie with one slice missing. Draw a few lines from the center toward the edge for the veins. On the big pad, add a small five-petal flower with a round center.

💡 **Tip:** Point the wedge cuts in different directions so the two pads don't look copied.

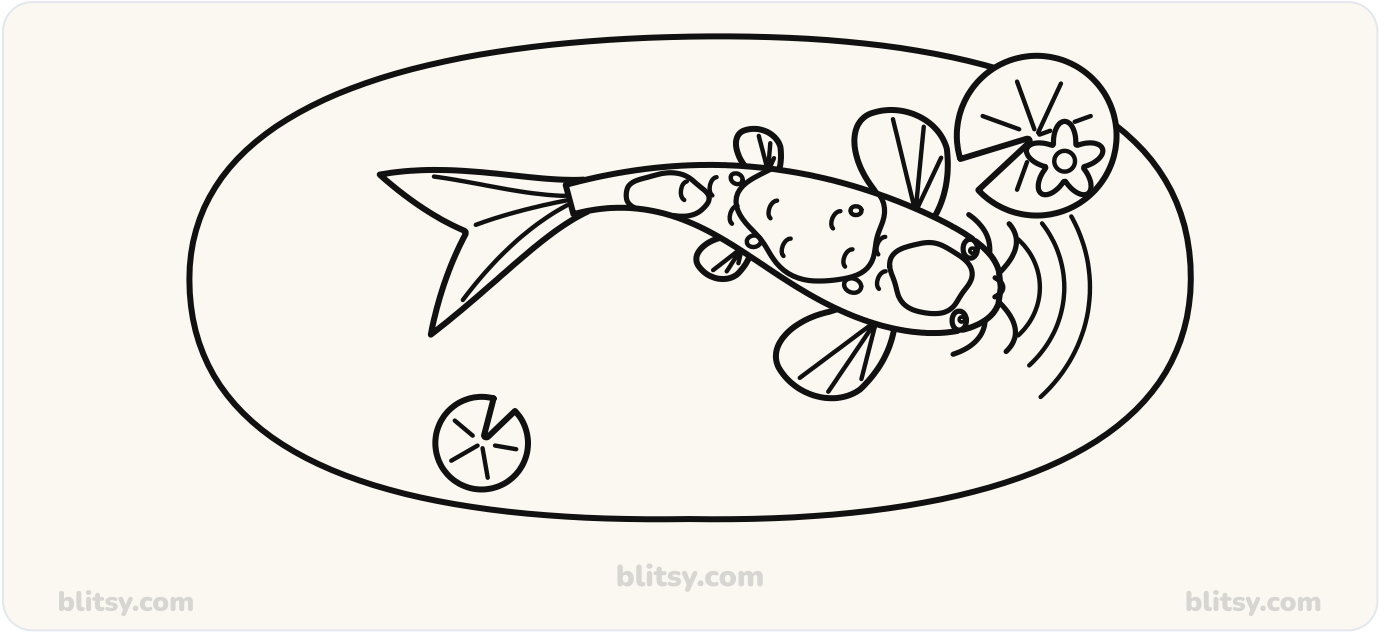
STEP 10 Outline the pond edge and the ripples



Trace the pond oval with a smoother, firmer line. In front of the koi's nose, draw three curved ripple lines, each a little bigger than the last, as if the fish just touched the surface. Stop each ripple where it meets the fins or the lily pad.

💡 **Tip:** Space the ripples evenly. Uneven gaps make them read as random scribbles.

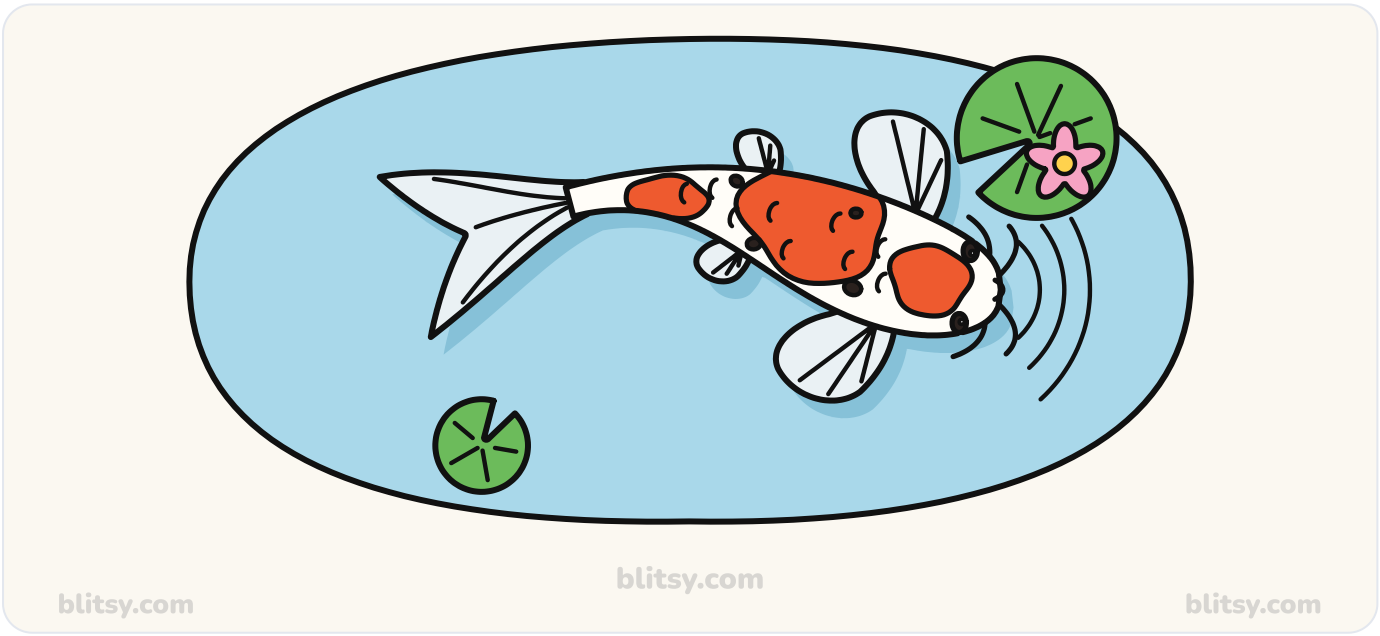
STEP 11 Ink the koi and erase the guides



Go over the keeper lines with your fineliner. I start with the body outline, then the tail and fins, and save the tiny scale marks and whiskers for last when my hand is warmed up. Skip the S-curve, the circles and the fin marks. Wait for the ink to dry before you erase.

💡 **Tip:** Ink the fin rays with a lighter hand than the outline, so the fins stay soft and see-through.

STEP 12 Color your koi



Color the pond light blue, and add a slightly darker blue shadow just below and to the right of the fish so it seems to float. Leave the body white. The patches are orange red, the spots and eyes black, and the fins and tail a very pale gray. Finish the lily pads in green with a pink flower and a yellow center.

💡 **Tip:** Color the water around the fish with strokes that follow the pond's curve, never across the koi.