

Wildlife Ponds

Having a pond in your garden can bring a whole host of interesting wildlife into your world, such as frogs, newts, dragonflies and a wide variety of aquatic insect life.

You are also helping to protect an important habitat that has seen massive decline and is still rapidly disappearing from our countryside through through damaging activities such as drainage, infilling and illegal dumping.

Building the Perfect Pond

First of all take a good look around your garden. While creating a pond will bring new wildlife to your garden, you don't want to lose what you already have! You want your pond to be on a flat bit of ground, in a sunny spot away from trees or tall plants which cast long shadows and drop bits of vegetation into the pond. However a little shade for some of the day is good and will add to the diversity of life in your pond.

Next thing to consider is the depth and shape of your pond. It is



Dragonfly

important that the depth of your pond is at least 90cm in places so that it doesn't freeze completely in the winter. There must also be at least one gently sloping side so that animals such as frogs can get out of the pond if they need to. See the diagram of a cross-section of an ideal pond shape.

Once you have dug out your pond and shaped your sides, remembering to make sure the sides are level (this can be done by placing a plank across the pond and using a spirit level), and dug a trench round the outside of the pond for the overhanging pond liner to drop into, it's time to lay your liner. Make sure all stones and sharp objects are removed,



A Wildlife Pond

and then line the pond with sand, newspaper, old carpet, or other padding to protect the liner. You should then unroll the liner into the pond, do not stretch it or walk on it. You can cover your liner with a protective overliner which should be available from your garden centre. You can finish off the edges of your pond by running turf into the water, giving you a natural look. This will also secure the liner and protect it from the sun.

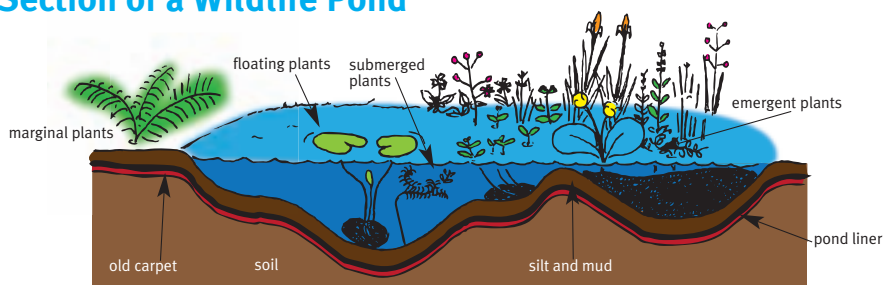
The best way to fill your pond is using rainwater. If you have to use tap water, wait one to two weeks before planting to

allow the nutrients to subside. Don't worry if your pond turns green, this will fade gradually as nutrients are used up and microscopic plant-eating animals move into the pond. In the meantime you can place stones and logs around the edge in anticipation of your future pond visitors. These logs and stones and any areas of rough vegetation will be used during the winter as hibernation sites by frogs and newts.



Frog

Cross Section of a Wildlife Pond



Choosing your plants

This is when your pond really starts to take shape! Remember that native species are usually more beneficial to wildlife than exotics, which can invade the pond, out-competing other species.

The secret to a happy pond is maintaining a stable balance of plants and creatures, similar to that found in a natural pond. This can be achieved by ensuring enough of the four plant types are present to support a healthy population of pond creatures; both predators and prey. Tiny insects like the waterflea will graze on plants and algae and will in turn be a food source for all the other pond inhabitants, such as dragonflies, beetles, nymphs, frogs and newts. Pumps, filters and even fish are not a good idea as they remove a whole section of the pond ecology, and therefore make it very difficult to achieve a natural balance and a good diversity of species.

The four general types of pond plants are submerged, floating, emergent and marginal. As a general rule of thumb your pond should be half open water and half vegetation -

- **Submerged plants** - These can be planted by tying a few stones to the roots and throwing into the water less than 1m deep, e.g. spiked water milfoil, water crowfoot, common water starwort
- **Floating plants** - These can be planted into the soil at the bottom of the pond up to a depth of approx 30cm e.g. yellow water-lily, white water-lily, amphibious bistort, pondweed (*Potamogeton* species)
- **Emergent plants** - These should be planted in shallow water e.g. water plantain, marsh cinquefoil, bogbean, mare's tail.
- **Marginal plants** - These should be planted just above the waters edge e.g. marsh marigold, meadow sweet, water mint, yellow flag iris, cuckoo flower, ragged robin.

Take extra care not to introduce invasive aquatic plants! These include floating pennywort, Australian swamp stonecrop and parrot's feather.

Visit www.waterforwildlife.co.uk for more information on which plants are the best and worst to introduce into your pond.



Frogs

Looking after your pond

By following the simple guidelines above your pond should be in good ecological balance and won't require much maintenance. However after 5 – 6 years you may need to give it a bit of a hand.

Things to watch out for -

- **Build up of dead organic matter** - the best time to deal with this is autumn, after the plants have flowered and before the minibeasts go into hibernation. Do not remove all dead organic material as it is good to have some for plants, and silt can be important for overwintering minibeasts and hibernating frogs. Leave your dredged material on the edge of the pond for a few days to allow any of the removed creatures to escape back into the pond.
- **Encroaching vegetation** - some plants may grow too abundantly, these can be pulled out or divided every few years. Again this should be done in autumn and the plants left on the edge of the pond for a few days to allow creatures to escape back into the pond.

Pond in a Barrel

If you have limited space, a half barrel lined with polythene makes a great home for wet-loving plants.

This mini pond will be home to many pond invertebrates – you'll be surprised how quickly wildlife will make it their home. With little effort and minimum cost you can get all the enjoyment of a pond, and you can even move it around your garden!



Creating a pond is one of the best ways of attracting new wildlife in to your garden so go ahead and create your own watery wildlife haven!
For more detailed information on how to create and maintain a wildlife pond please get in touch with UWT and ask for copies of the 'Wildlife Pond Creation and Management' habitat guides.

You can download more Make Space for Nature information guides from our website www.ulsterwildlifetrust.org or contact us on 028 44830282 or email info@ulsterwildlifetrust.org.

Frogs © Mike Hartwell