

Creating your own Wildlife Pond

Why bother? If you want to increase the bio-diversity (increase the number of species) in your garden and do your bit for the environment –build a pond! When it's built, you can spend hours watching the coming and going of all sorts of wildlife, ponds are really incredibly useful to wildlife.

Is it difficult? A very small pond like an up-turned dustbin lid or a shallow tray is simple. For a bigger pond, if you can use a spade and a spirit level, you can do it. The pond will need maintaining – removal of leaves, blanket and duck weed perhaps twice a year and cut back pond plants once a year.

Do I need to stock the pond? No, wildlife will find it. Provide and it will come.

What site? Its best if it's not in full shade or full sun, but in your garden you might only have one site – whatever, any site better than nothing. Smaller ponds will need topping up in hot weather.

Size? The bigger the better, it will require less topping up with water the bigger it is.

Shape? It doesn't matter. Square or round is formal, irregular shapes look more natural. It is best to provide a shallow slope to allow anything that falls in a route out. Alternatively some sticks to act as a ladder as an exit for small mammals.

Depth? In the middle of the pond, the deeper the better, if it is two feet deep or more it won't freeze over.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR POND

Digging the hole. If there is turf, remove it in slices and save for later. Dig the hole and use the spoil to make a bank or rockery at the side of the pond. Make sure the edges are level or the water will spill over at one side. Check the level by placing a plank across sides of the pond, over the hole in several directions, use a spirit level and build up or reduce the sides until the whole rim is as level as possible.

Lining the pond. Unless you have clay soil to retain water, the pond will need a liner. Butyl rubber is best. Measure the size of liner needed by laying an old

carpet or sheets to estimate the size. Make sure there is at least two feet spare beyond the rim. Buy the thickest liner you can afford- there are many qualities. Lay down an old carpet in the hole or a layer of sacks to protect the liner from sharp stones or glass. (You may need to stand in the pond at some times also). Place the liner over this layer and fill with water. As the pond fills, flatten out creases and stretch the liner to leave to leave as smooth as possible, pushing the liner into the corners.

The chlorine in the tap water will evaporate.

Plants. The best way to fill your pond and its surrounds with plants is to take thinnings from friends and neighbours' ponds – they will be only too pleased to help out as pond plants grow and spread very quickly. The pond will need oxygenating plants to keep the water and its occupants vibrant, some floating plants, deep water plants, marginal plants on the shelves and marsh edge plants.

Surroundings. To encourage more wildlife, place some logs, brash or rocks at the edges of the bank made from the surplus spoil. These nooks and crannies will act as places for wintering toads, newts and their like. Use any turf you removed when digging the pond to lay over the exposed lining, making a natural finish. Alternatively, cover the exposed liner with soil and natural wild plants (weeds!) will green up the edges of the pond.

Fish. If you want a fish pond, you won't see much wildlife - the fish will eat the lot and their waste will need filtering from the mud- a pump will be needed- it's a completely different set up.

Wildlife. When you have built your pond, it will very quickly stock itself. However, a bucket-full of water from an established pond will speed things up. Amphibians remarkably will find it, insects will arrive instantly. Snails will be present in the plants, birds and small animals will bathe and drink at the pond, bats will feed over it. Dragonflies will arrive and lay eggs, frogspawn will appear in spring, Herons will drop in to see what's edible. Complex food chains develop in the water, you will have your own miniature nature reserve - it's magical.

Help and advice. If you have any questions, contact us and we will be pleased to share our experiences with you. Go on, give it a go.