

# Designing garden ponds for wildlife

Do you want to make a garden pond that's good for wildlife? Here is some advice from the charity Pond Conservation that will help turn your new pond into a tranquil watery haven for wildlife

For the perfect wildlife pond...

Keep the water clean, keep the pond very shallow, and keep the edges natural.

## Clean water is key

Really clean water is essential for making great wildlife ponds. For most people rainwater is the best as tap water often has high nutrient levels.

Most garden ponds need a liner - but don't add soil or upside down turves to your pond to root plants, because turves have high levels of nutrients that will pollute the pond. Put a layer of fine washed gravel or clean sand (we use the sand for children's sandpits) on the bottom. If you are adding aquatic plants in pots fill these with a sand/gravel mix, not compost to avoid adding nutrients.



## Make natural edges with really shallow water

The greatest variety of animals and plants live in very shallow water at the edges of the pond – not in the middle. So the best wildlife ponds have very gently shelving natural edges, often fringed by grasses.

To make good habitat for, tadpoles, newt larvae, water beetles and dragonflies make areas of water no more than 2-3 cm deep (an inch or so).

Unless you're keeping big fish, the deepest areas need to be no more than 25-30 cm (1 foot). Most pond guides say dig ponds 60-70 cm deep to 'stop them freezing solid' but in Britain there's no need

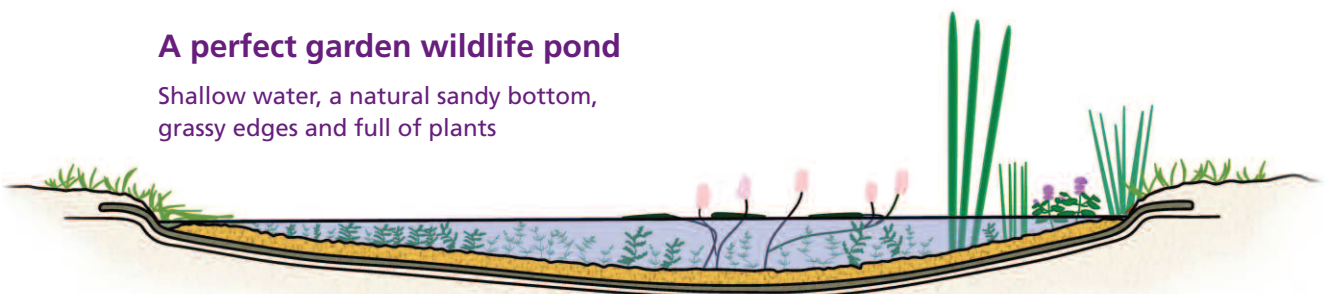
to do this because we only ever get an inch or two of ice on the water even in the coldest weather.

## Let wildlife come to your pond naturally

Don't add sludge to your pond to 'get it started' – over millions of years pond animals have evolved ways of finding new ponds. In the spring small animals will be arriving within minutes and you might see animals such as water beetles and dragonflies come to your new pond in just a couple of days. Even plants can turn up on their own though they are usually slower. Amphibians will usually arrive in a year or two.

## A perfect garden wildlife pond

Shallow water, a natural sandy bottom, grassy edges and full of plants



*"A garden pond is a joy and you can make one in a weekend."*

Alan Titchmarsh



Keith Waikling



P. Rawcliffe



## What about fish?

Fish are a natural part of the wildlife of bigger ponds but fish do eat smaller animals, including frog and newt tadpoles (but not toads), and will often make the water more cloudy and polluted unless you install filters.

If you're keen on fish and also want to have lots of wildlife, make sure the pond has some areas of really dense cover, lots of grasses at the edge and maybe an area that the fish are kept out of. You could also think about making a separate fish free pond.

## Should I add plants?

Plants provide habitats for animals: somewhere to lay eggs, somewhere to feed and a place to live. Most natural ponds have a mixture of emergent, floating-leaved and underwater plants. In the shallow margins they have grasses or low growing marginal plants trailing into the water.

If you want to introduce plants, the best place to get them is from a local wild source – make sure you have permission from the landowner, and don't take plants from nature reserves. It is illegal to remove protected species.

If you buy plants make sure that you don't accidentally bring along unwanted non-native species at the same time – a number of these have escaped from garden ponds and are now a serious problem. Check out our website to find out more about good and bad plants.

## Trees and falling leaves

It's fine to locate your pond near to bushes or trees: the leaves and twigs shed into the pond will provide food, shelter and case building materials for animals. Trees and bushes also provide shade, which will stop the pond drying out so quickly in hot summers.

Ideally, ponds created in shady areas should be very shallow, no more than 30 cm (1 foot deep), this ensures light reaches the pond bottom so plants can grow here. The oxygen-rich shallow waters will also ensure that leaves rapidly decay. Don't make shady ponds too deep, a thick layer of leaves can build up on the bottom, deoxygenating the water, and reducing the pond's value for wildlife.

There is a lot more information on our website about making and managing ponds, and about encouraging pond wildlife. You can also make a donation to help us continue working to protect freshwater wildlife across Britain.

[www.pondconservation.org.uk](http://www.pondconservation.org.uk)

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