



'A garden pond is a joy and you can make one in a weekend'

Alan Titchmarsh

Wildlife ponds for the garden

Whether you already have a garden pond or are thinking of making a new one, here are some top tips from Pond Conservation to help you make the most of your pond for wildlife. You can make a garden pond at any time of the year.

Clean water is key

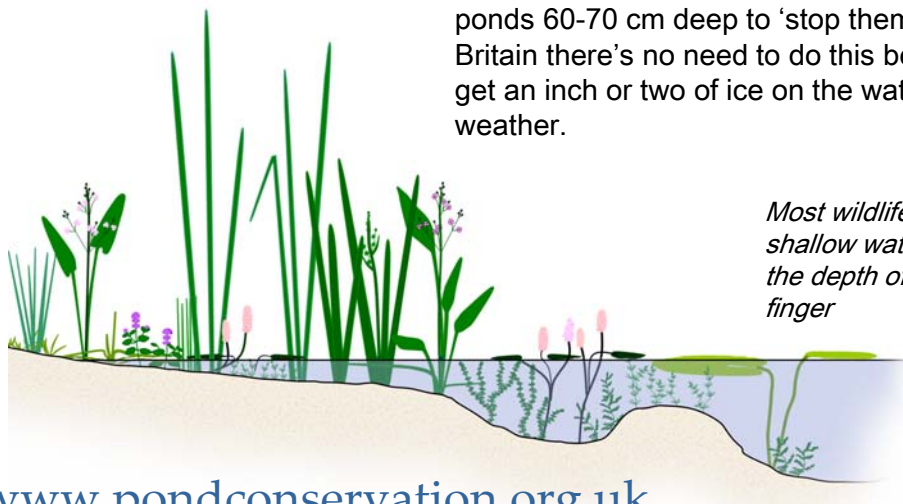
Really clean water is essential for making the best wildlife ponds. For most people rainwater is best as tap water often has high nutrient levels. A typical garden pond will need three or four water butts worth to fill it.

Most garden ponds will 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're 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 usually only get an inch or two of ice on the water, even in the coldest weather.



Most wildlife loves really shallow water, just half the depth of your little finger

Let wildlife come to your pond naturally

There's no need to 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 arrive within minutes and you might see water beetles and dragonflies come to your new pond in just a couple of days. Amphibians will usually arrive in a year or two. Even plants can come on their own though they are usually a bit slower!

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 special 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 might even think about making a separate fish-free pond.

A newly created clean-water garden pond: follow its development at <http://thegardenpondblog.org.uk>



Should I add plants?

Plants provide habitats for animals: somewhere to lay eggs, somewhere to feed and a place to live. Most ponds would naturally have a mixture of emergent, floating-leaved and underwater plants. In the shallow margins they would 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. If you buy plants make sure that you don't accidentally bring along unwanted non-native plant species as some of these have escaped from garden ponds and are now a serious problem.

Trees and falling leaves

Many ponds naturally have sediments on the bottom made up of fallen leaves, twigs and branches. These provide shelter, food and case-building materials for a variety of animals. So you don't need to remove sediments to keep your pond in 'good condition' because they are the habitat of animals in the pond. But small ponds can be overwhelmed by leaves if they are right under a big tree: if you think you have too many leaves and too much sediment remove small amounts at a time, carefully checking for animal life.

We hope you get lots of enjoyment from your garden wildlife pond

For more advice on making ponds, on pond wildlife, or to make a donation call us on 01865 483249 or see

www.pondconservation.org.uk

Pond Conservation's garden ponds work is supported by

