

# Wonder of water



In her gardening conundrums column, Lynn O'Keefe, DSc Horticulture tells you all you need to know about pond planting



Water features are back in vogue. But they're not the square concrete ponds of the 80s with goldfish and garden gnomes with a fishing rods.

They are much more natural in look and can be any size or shape. What adding a pond does for your garden is many fold. It adds light, you can have a still pond that reflects a view, or add a small pump, or a breeze, and you get rippling light, and sound too. But most importantly a pond brings life into the garden, especially if there are some natural ponds or lakes in your area.

Ponds are bathing and drinking places for birds, somewhere for frogs to lay eggs and tadpoles to grow. Dragonflies and damselflies start out life in ponds, and what's not to love about watching a whirligig beetle doing the rounds on the surface of the water like some crazy dervish.

## RIGHT LET'S GET HEALTH AND SAFETY OUT OF THE WAY.

Firstly, there is this fact that the smaller the water feature the larger the perceived risk, so while we don't fence off oceans or lakes, we panic over small garden ponds. But if you regularly have small children in your garden and you want to relax while they can safely play, then a little fence between the play space and the pond space is a good idea or have the pond very clearly visible from patios or kitchen windows.

Best for children and wildlife is to have one side sloping out (like a beach) so that everyone can climb back out if they fall in, or only put in a tiny pond raised up, like a birdbath. Word to the wise, don't put gravel/stones and ponds close together if kids are around, they'll only be tempted to spend their time throwing the gravel into the pond.

## HOW TO CONSTRUCT A POND.

There will be some very lucky individuals reading this who can divert a stream or dig a hole and naturally let it fill with water, but for the rest of us we'll need a pond liner. There are two types of

liners, rigid and flexible. The rigid liners are like a bath and come in various shapes, and you just need to dig a hole to the correct size and shape to fit the preformed liner in. They are then ready to go.

The flexible liner is bought as a sheet in various widths, and you can create any size or shape of pond, calculate how much liner you'll need (3D maths can be tricky) and buy accordingly. You'll need an underlay, much like when laying carpet, and old carpet makes a good underlay, to prevent any stones in the soil puncturing your liner when the weight of the water is put in. Sand works well too.

The trickiest bit is getting your levels right so you don't end up looking at exposed plastic liner on one side while the other end of the pond is overflowing. It's a bit like building sandcastles as the tide comes in, a bit of fun engineering!

## HOW TO PLANT A POND.

There are plants that lurk at the bottom, and those that float on the surface and everything in between. The best ponds have a couple of depths. You are aiming for a third of the water surface to be covered in plants. Aquatic plants will absorb nutrients in the water and add back in oxygen, both of which are the difference between a pond that's full of green algae and one with crystal clear water.

It must be said though that any pond I've done has taken 18 months to find its balance and clear.

Water plants I'd recommend include the native marsh marigold which has beautiful yellow flowers, the native bog bean which has white star shaped flowers on tall stems, and water lilies, which come in a range of sizes. Some aquatic plants are invasive but in a small pond can be kept in check, but in larger ponds get out of hand, and never release ornamental pond plants into streams or lakes as they can create huge problems.

## HOW TO INTRODUCE AQUATIC ANIMALS

The best way is to get a bucket of water with some mud from the bottom of an existing healthy

garden pond. With this bucket load you should get a good selection of insects and pond snails and so forth to get your pond started. Try not to use tap water to top up your pond, as the chlorine in the water will not suit pond life.

My two garden ponds have a gutter from the house flowing into them so that when it rains they're topped up with rain water. All ponds need topping up as water evaporates, especially if you've a fountain, you can buy filters for your hose that can help to, but the gutter works great.

## TO PUMP OR NOT TO PUMP.

A pump adds oxygen and sound. The sound of water exactly counters traffic noise, so if you've a busy road nearby water splashing will help drown that out. More fun maths is involved in calculating the pump strength required and many come with wee solar panels so you don't have to mess with electricity and water! You don't have to put in a pump, and aquatic plants will be enough to keep the water clear.

There's a fair bit of work in putting in a pond and maintenance in getting them established for the first 18 months, but I can't recommend enough adding a pond to your garden. I love the reflections of tree silhouettes in winter. I love watching the birds bathing and the dragonflies darting to and fro, and even the rain drops splashing on the surface is enchanting.

We live in a wet climate, let's embrace it and make welcome water into our gardens!

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