

Treat yourself to a wildlife pond

Ponds have been garden features for millennia.

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I have fond childhood memories of a pond in the beautiful garden of a family friend. These memories, and Alan Titchmarsh, inspired me to create my own pond. I find it a most rewarding garden feature.

The process begins by finding a site. Somewhere not too shaded, where the sun can shine on at least part of the pond's surface.

Then, dig a hole. In my case that hole was 11m long, three and a half metres wide and 90cm deep at its longest, widest and deepest points, serpentine in shape.

Safety is paramount. Always be aware that ponds can pose a danger to children in particular. Take precautions to ensure safe or restricted access.

It is a good idea to leave shelves for plants that don't want to be too deep and for wildlife survival at different levels. My pond goes from a maximum depth of 90cm, gently over its full length, to a comfortable slope for water wildlife to crawl out of the pond when necessary.

Planting beds were created within the shelves, which were edged by rounded stones and filled with soil for planting edge-of-water plants such as



Marsh marigold.



Candelabra primula, Hosta, marsh marigold and Iris. I lined the pond with old carpet. Traditionally, sand is used to ensure there is no possibility of puncturing the Butyl rubber liner with sharp stones.

The rubber liner is the most expensive part – everything else is just hard work. There are other liners available in rigid format and even a puddling clay which can be compressed into the pond wall, where synthetic liners are unacceptable.

At this point, you should have a waterproof hole. Fill this with water. I used saved rainwater and benefitted from a torrential downpour to cap it off, but you may find yourself using treated tap water, which should be let settle before putting in plants or fish.

The choice of plants varies from deep water lilies to marginal plants such as flowering rush. The edge of the pond, where the overflow happens, can accommodate beauties like Rheum, Astilbe and Hosta, while

atmosphere can be created using architectural plants such as tree ferns, or in a dry spot, the hanging flowers of the beautiful angel's fishing rod (Dierama).

Oxygenators like water hawthorn may be needed, but avoid using Canadian pond weed and other invasive species. Only buy from reputable sources, as unwanted plants such as duck weed, once introduced to a pond, can never be successfully removed.

Alan Titchmarsh once said: "Build it and they (wildlife) will come." And he was proven correct. While the pond was filling, I saw my first diving beetle. This was followed by damselflies the next day and within a week, we had a frog in residence, along with numerous other pond life. I am still hoping for a newt or two!

Any garden can benefit from a pond and it is only limited by your imagination. It's like going to the cinema – there's something new and exciting to see every time you look.