

Sussex Wildlife Trust WG9

Gardening for Wildlife

Factsheet



Why have a pond?

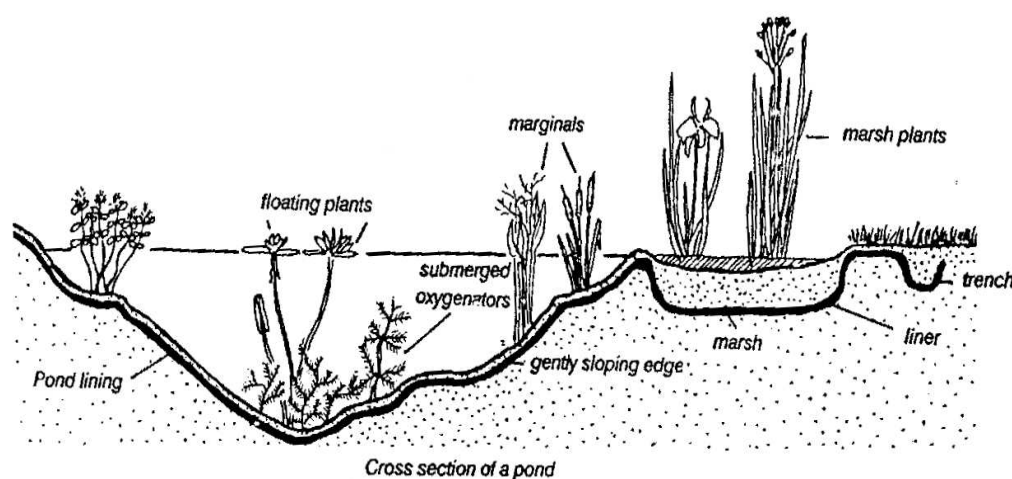
A pond can attract more variety of wildlife than any other single feature in the garden. It provides a breeding space for frogs, toads, and dragonflies, as well as a habitat for a host of other creatures, from water snails to pondskaters. A pond which is shallow at one end will provide a bathing area for birds, and a watering hole for hedgehogs.

Where to put your pond

Position the pond in a sunny place, unshaded by trees, nor overlooked by deciduous trees that will fill the pond with leaves in autumn. Decaying leaves in a pond use up oxygen and can cause the pond to become stagnant.

It is a good idea to provide some shelter (e.g. bushes, a pile of logs) nearby, to which birds, amphibians or hedgehogs can retreat if necessary (though bushes could also be a hiding place for the neighbourhood cats!)

Pond profile



A pond which is ideal for wildlife will have:

- a minimum area of 4 to 5 square metres;
- a minimum depth of 80 centimetres (2 ½ feet), so that at least part of the pond does not freeze over in winter;
- a shallow sloping area, to allow birds and other animals easy access;

Ponds

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- a range of depths, to provide appropriate positions for different plants;
- a marsh or bog area;
- an area of hard paving for access to the pond.

If you do not have the space, then a smaller area or small containers may still be useful to wildlife. For example, old sinks or half barrels may still provide a home for aquatic insects, and breeding areas for dragonflies. Formal ponds will do the same. A shallow container can provide a birdbath.

Pond linings

There are several materials which can be used to line a pond, such as clay, concrete and pre-formed linings. The latter are likely to have sides that are too steep for wildlife, and which prevent the build-up of silt.

The best solution is probably a flexible lining. The options are polythene, PVC, or butyl rubber. Polythene is the cheapest. Butyl rubber is the most expensive, but it is the most durable.

Detailed instructions for making a pond can be found in many gardening books. Garden centres with aquatic sections should also be able to help.

Stocking your pond

A bucket of sludge from a friend's pond will provide myriad small creatures. If you want to introduce frogs or toads, make sure you take spawn from a garden pond, rather than a wild one and the frogs are free from diseases such as red-leg. Fish and ducks are not suitable for a wildlife pond as they eat everything.

Pond plants

Pond plants divide into several categories:

- *Oxygenators*, which are usually *submerged* plants.
- *Floating* plants. The leaves of these plants float on the surface. Some of the plants may be rooted, but others float freely. The floating leaves provide shade for the water below, thus reducing build-up of algae. They also act as platforms for viewing, courting or mating for a variety of insects.
- *Emergent* plants have erect stems and leaves, which emerge above the water's surface. These are important for dragonfly nymphs to crawl up before they become adult flying insects.
- *Marginal* plants need to grow at the shallow edges of the pond. Some need to be permanently in a few centimetres of water, while others will tolerate periodic drying out.

- *Marsh* or *bog* plants are wetland plants that grow near the water's edge. Their requirements vary from those that must be in permanently wet soil, to those which need moisture retentive soil, but do not tolerate being waterlogged.

Native plants for ponds

Plant type	Scientific name	Common name
Oxygenators	<i>Ceratophyllum demersum</i> <i>Myriophyllum spicatum</i> <i>Ranunculus aquatilis</i> <i>Callitriche stagnalis</i> <i>Hottonia palustris</i> <i>Potamogeton crispus</i>	hornwort, spiked water-millfoil, water crowfoot, water starwort, water violet, curled pondweed.
Floating	<i>Polygonum amphibium</i> <i>Hydrocharis morsus-ranae</i> <i>Potamogeton natans</i> <i>Nymphoides peltata</i> <i>Ranunculus aquatilis</i> <i>Stratoites aloides</i>	amphibious bistort, frogbit, broad-leaved pondweed (not in small ponds) fringed water lily. water crowfoot, water soldier,
Emergent	<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i> <i>Sparganium erectum</i> <i>Ranunculus lingua</i> <i>Butomus umbellatus</i> <i>Iris pseudacorus</i>	bogbean, branched bur-reed, greater spearwort, flowering rush, yellow flag.
Marginal	<i>Sagittaria sagittifolia</i> <i>Veronica beccabunga</i> <i>Ranunculus flammula</i> <i>Caltha palustris</i> <i>Myositis scorpioides</i> <i>Mentha aquatica</i> <i>Alisma plantago-aquatica</i> <i>Veronica anagallis-aquatica</i>	arrowhead, brooklime, lesser spearwort, marsh marigold, water-forget-me-not, water mint, water plantain, water speedwell
Marsh	<i>Lysimachia nummularia</i> <i>Cardamine pratensis</i> <i>Lycopus europaeus</i> <i>Epilobium hirsutum</i> <i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i> <i>Stachys palustris</i> <i>Filipendula ulmaria</i> <i>Lythrum salicaria</i> <i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i> <i>Junus</i> spp and <i>Carex</i> spp	creeping jenny, cuckooflower gipsywort, great hairy willow-herb, hemp agrimony, marsh woundwort, meadowsweet, purple loosestrife, ragged robin, rushes and sedges,

There is a certain amount of overlap between marginal and marsh species.

The Sussex Wildlife Trust manages 36 nature reserves and uses its knowledge and skills to help the people of Sussex enjoy, understand and care for wildlife and the places where it lives.

The Sussex Wildlife Trust is one of 47 trusts working to protect wildlife in town and country throughout the whole UK.

For more information on the work of the Sussex Wildlife Trust and how to become a member please contact:

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Do Not have these plants in your pond!

There are some plant species sold in garden centres that are positively dangerous, usually non-native species from the southern hemisphere. These can “escape” from garden ponds into the countryside and cause great damage by completely taking over, destroying the native ecosystem.

Plants to avoid:

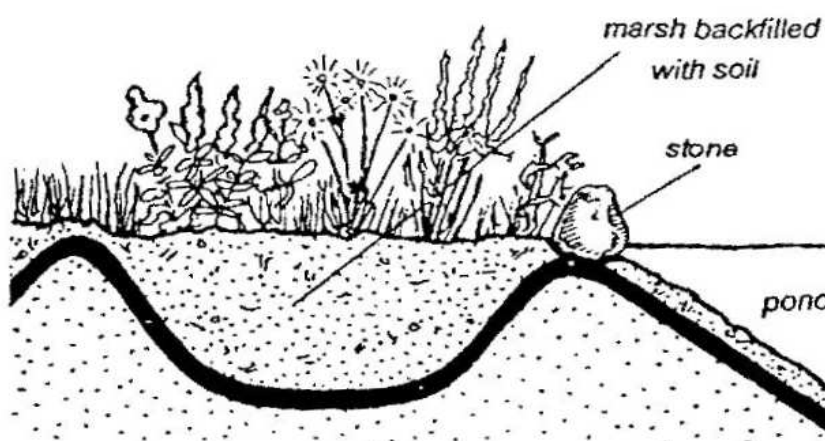
Water Fern / Fairy Moss – *Azolla*

Swamp Stonecrop – *Crassula helmsii*

Floating Pennywort – *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*

Creating a marsh

Creating a marsh can add variety to your pond. Extend your liner over a shelf at the edge and fill with soil. The shelf should fall just below the water level to allow water into the marsh, but be high enough to prevent it becoming part of the pond. You can use stone to prevent soil falling into the pond.



Cross section of a marsh

Maintaining your pond

Once established, a pond should need relatively little attention. During the initial phase, algal growth is quite likely to occur. One reason is that tap water contains high levels of nutrients. Keep nutrient levels low by using rainwater to fill the pond or let tap water stand for a couple of days before adding to pond. A tightly bound bundle of twigs or straw will provide habitat for microscopic animals and so keep algal growth down.

Removing the algae from the water will also remove nutrients. If you remove any algal growth, you should shake it and leave it at the side of the pond for a few days, this allows pond creatures to make their way back to the pond. Adding water snails also helps as they eat algae.

Remember that it may take a season or two for a new pond to settle down and find its own balance. Do not panic if the water turns green or one plant species seems to take over for a while. Things should stabilise provided the three “pond pariahs” are avoided – fish, ducks and non-native plants!

Safety

Very young children can drown in just 5 centimetres of water. A pond in the garden means you need to supply either constant vigilance, or a way of making sure children cannot fall into the pond (a mesh just under the surface of the water, a fence all around, or strong vegetation surrounding the pond).

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