



BUILD YOUR OWN POND

With winter looming, how about planning something special for your garden next year? Now is an excellent time to build a pond. Winter months are ideal for digging as you won't have much other gardening to do and it will also give the pond time to settle before you plant it up or introduce fish. A pond of any size adds a whole new dimension to your garden and even the smallest area can benefit from a water garden. A half-barrel of water with small water lilies growing in it will provide a home for insects such as dragonflies and pond beetles. This is also the ideal pond if you have young children who are at risk with more conventional ponds. Consider a suitable site for your pond.

It should be in an open, sunny area and the ground should be as level as possible, otherwise you will spend considerable time levelling it manually. Define the shape of your pond using sand, rope or hosepipe; gently curving edges are best. Remove the turf first and store it to put back around the edge of the finished pond and start digging! Use a plank of wood with a spirit level on top to keep checking all sides are level or you will end up with all the water at one end of the pond.

The deepest area of the pond should be at least 60cm deep to allow you to grow water lilies and to provide a safe haven for fish and other pond life. You also need to make a shelf around the edge to place marginal plants that give shelter to frogs - this should be about 20-25cm deep. Gently sloping sides in at least one part of the pond will let birds and animals to safely drink and will also allow any animal that's fallen in to escape.

Once you have a big hole in your garden it's time to start turning it into a pond. Remove any sharp stones and roots from the base and sides. The best liner is Butyl liner. When buying liner, it's best to err on the side of caution and buy more than you think you will need - you can use any excess to make a bog garden later. To work out how much liner to buy, use this information:

Length of liner = max. depth of pond x 2 + max. length of pond + 1 metre

Width of liner = max. depth of pond x 2 + max. width of pond + 1 metre

You need to line the hole with something to protect the liner. Some people use old carpet, but this is difficult to mould to shape. You have a choice of lining with a 4cm layer of damp sand or buy a proprietary pond liner. If possible, use both. Enlist a friend to help with the liner. Lower the liner gently into the hole and don't worry about laying it out neatly; the water will do that for you. Anchor the liner with stones around the edge to stop it falling in, moving them as the pond fills up. Put your hosepipe into the deepest part of the pond and start filling it up. The water will stretch and shape the liner neatly to the sides of the hole. As the water level rises, make sure you fold the liner evenly and neatly into the curves. Once the pond is full trim off any excess liner, leaving an overlap of around 30cm all around and peg down the edges. Cover this exposed area with turf or stones. Don't leave any liner uncovered as it will quickly perish in the air.

Now leave the pond to settle; chlorine from tap water will evaporate and don't plant anything in it until next spring. A bucket full of water from an existing, mature pond will give the pond's flora and fauna a head start. And now you can sit back and watch for the local wildlife to find it.