

How to Make Your Own Mini Wildlife Pond



Why do I want a wildlife pond? What is a wildlife pond?

Water is life! Even a mini pond will attract wildlife to your garden. Your pond will attract and support dragonflies, damselflies, hoverflies and bees. It might even attract birds and frogs! A mini pond would look fantastic on a deck or patio-- or even a front door step.

A wildlife pond is simply a pond designed to support native wildlife. It's filled with native plants and, for the most part, left on its own to do its wild thing. A wildlife pond differs from other garden ponds in that it doesn't have a mechanical filtration system-- the plants do that job!-- and it doesn't have goldfish or koi, which are not native and would prey upon any native visitors.

What will I need?

- A container. For this demonstration, we're going to use a galvanized wash basin.
- An assortment of rocks to line the bottom of the container and to support plant pots.
- Aquatic pots. These are pots made of plastic mesh-- they let water in and roots out. You can make your own aquatic pots by recycling old plastic plant pots-- just poke lots of holes into the plastic.
- Plants! Read below to see what kind of plants you'll need.

The plants

In order for your pond to be successful and not turn a horrible shade of green or brown, you will need at least one plant from each category to create a balanced ecosystem. Each type of plant does a different job or jobs for the pond.

- Submerged: These are plants that are at the bottom of a pond.
- Emergent: These plants are in the shallows or at the edges of the pond. Their roots submerged, but the rest of the plant is above water.
- Floating: These plants float. Their roots might also float (as in duck meal) or be in the soil at the bottom of the pond.

Do not take plants from the wild.

How do I assemble this?

Read the directions below or watch the above video to learn how to assemble your mini pond.

1. Pot up the plants that need potting in the aquatic baskets. You can use special aquatic soil or even garden soil. Don't use regular potting soil as its nutrients can cause an algae bloom. You might want to top dress the plants with gravel or rocks to hold them in place.
2. If the submerged plants are loose, bundle them up with twine and add a weight.

3. Cover the bottom of the pond with small rocks or gravel.
4. Add water. This should be rain water. If you must use tap water, fill the pond and let it sit outside without any plants for a few days so any added chemicals can dissipate. **Do not use water from an existing pond.**
5. Add bricks or rocks on which to place your emergent plants. The edge of the pot should be just submerged, so you might have to play around with the height.
6. Depending on the depth of your pond, you might need to add a brick or a rock to support the pots of the floating plants. These pots should be placed so its plant can float.
7. Be sure to add landing surfaces for insects and birds. This can be a partially exposed rock.
8. Enjoy your cute little pond and wait for the wildlife to arrive!

Note: Do not take frogs, frogspawn or other wildlife or plants from wild ponds.

Now what?

Place in a spot that gets sun with a few hours of shade. Avoid full shade.

Your mini pond will need little upkeep except for a few light chores. Keep the water topped up, if needed, using rain water. Use a small net to clean out any algae or abundant fallen leaves. Some fallen leaves are fine and add good coverage for any critters. The rotting of too many fallen leaves can affect the pH of the water and cause algae. When you remove any dead materials, don't immediately compost it. If you can, leave it near the water's edge for a day so any insect life can crawl back in.

You should also keep an eye out for mosquitos and might want to consider adding a larvicide to the water.

[This resource](#) has more information.

What about winter?

Native pond plants can handle freezing temperatures, but since your mini pond is in a container, it will freeze solid. You will need to bring it in for the winter.

Leave your pond outside for the fall and when the leaves of the exposed plants die back, cut them back. Then simply bring your pond into a cool basement or garage. For a larger, heavier pond, you can transfer your plants into a more portable bucket.

Wait. I want something bigger than a wash basin!

It is totally possible to use the above principles and dig a medium or large wildlife pond and sustain it without mechanical filtration! Keep in mind that your pond should extend below the freeze line so any frogs that move in can hibernate for the winter.



The author's wildlife pond

Resources

Plants

[Native Aquatic Plants of Vermont](#). Vermont Invasives

[Plant Finder](#). Native Plant Trust.

Ponds

[Aquatic Plants](#). PennState Extension

[Identifying Aquatic Plants](#). PennState Extension

[Pond Plants Are a Vital Part of a Balanced Aquatic Ecosystem](#). Michigan State University Extension