



Wildlife Gardening: pond maintenance

Once you have built your wildlife pond, there will be some simple maintenance tasks to complete, so that you can keep it beautiful and buzzing. Most jobs are concerned with managing the growth of pond plants and removing dead leaves to make sure the pond stays healthy.

Spring maintenance

It is important to avoid disturbing your pond during spring as this is when the pond insects are starting to emerge and there is lots of activity happening below the surface.

Summer maintenance

You can allow the water level to fluctuate naturally, but most people prefer to keep their pond at a constant level. When you top it up with a hose use a sprinkler setting. Pond plants will need controlling, because they do grow rapidly. Aim to keep the pond about three-quarters full with plants (less plants invite more algae to grow):

- **Excess pondweed** – remove it by hand every few weeks.
- **Growth of filamentous algae** – remove it by hand, or wind it round a stick.
- **Growth of other algae** – put a bundle of barley straw in the water.
- **Duckweed** – remove it by running a light rake across the surface, or using a hose to chase it into a corner.
- **Water fern (azolla)** – try to pick it off as soon as you see the little red leaves. If established, it will be hard to get rid of but should disappear in a few years. If you have lots, remove it as for duckweed.

After removal, pond plants should be left in a pile at the side of the pond for any caught wildlife to return to the water. You can of course search through the pile and give a helping hand.

Winter care

Most major works should be done in autumn when there is less activity in the pond, but before the pond creatures are dormant.

Every year

- Remove the looser vegetation so that just a quarter of the pond is dense with plants

Every two/three years

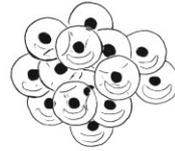
- Lift reeds, iris and other plants with rhizomatous roots, split them with a saw and plant one third back in.
- If you get vigorous summer growth of algae to the extent that oxygenating plants cannot survive – you have a nutrient problem. You may need to drain the pond to clear out the silt, and refill with fresh water. Otherwise look at other causes of nutrient increase like lawn fertiliser.



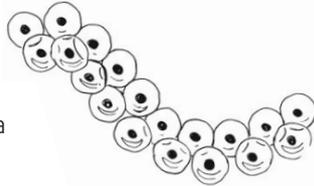
Frogs and Toads



Frogs, have smooth skin in a range of colours, and strong back legs for jumping. They need low dense evergreen plants round the pond in which to shelter and hunt for insects and slugs, crevices around the garden, and deeper hollows in ponds to hibernate in. Frogspawn is like a bowl of jelly.



Toads, have warty dry skin, and weaker legs for crawling up to a mile. They usually prefer bigger deeper ponds for spawning and more often shelter in the corner of a garden, ignoring the pond. Have a particular fondness for ants. Toad tadpoles can survive goldfish better than frog tadpoles. Toadspawn is like a mermaid's necklace.



Newts, Males have crests, females are smooth, they only have little legs so can't walk very far from the pond, and hibernate nearby under logs and stones. Newts wrap each of their eggs in a leaf of pondweed.

Leaks

If your pond level drops dramatically in summer, do not presume it is a leak. Pond plants drink a lot of water. If the level drops rapidly on cloudy windless days, you probably have a leak.

- Autumn is the best time to fix leaks.
- Allow the water level to settle until it won't go down any more, to help you find the leak.
- If the leak is near the top of the pond, you have a messy job of lifting plants and turning back the overliner to find the leak.
- If you think it is deeper down, it will probably be easier to drain the pond first – hire a mechanical pump and fit a filter over it.
- Use a bicycle repair kit to repair small leaks. If a leaking pond is over fifteen years old it may be simpler to lift everything out and put in a new liner.

Contact Froglife, for more information or if you find diseased frogs in your pond, on 01733 558 960 or visit their website www.froglife.org



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