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# Backyard Ponds for Wildlife



## Backyard Pond Basics

These easy to create water features can add wonderful diversity to your yard while providing endless hours of entertainment and educational opportunities for you and your families.

Often a “sight for sore eyes” to salamanders and frogs who may have lost their natural vernal pools to development, backyard ponds can be teeming with life soon after they are created. Spring will greet you with salamanders, singing frogs and toads, and egg masses appearing overnight. Reptiles, such as turtles and snakes, may also take advantage of this new addition to your Backyard Wildlife Habitat site. If you provide a shallow area, birds and butterflies will delight in daily bathing and mud-puddling routines.

Voracious “mosquito-eaters,” dragonflies and damselflies, will also set up home in your pond and work to keep nature in balance. Balanced backyard ponds rarely attract unusual numbers of mosquitos as often believed. A variety of flora and fauna will work together to maintain your pond as a healthy ecosystem.

## Designing your pond

**Beach-side property** is where it’s at! If possible, use a flexible pond liner and design a beach into your pond edge. This shallow gradation allows easy access for critters to get in, and out, and gives birds and butterflies a place to dip into shallow water. Many wildlife drownings occur in backyard ponds because they inadvertently fall in and cannot escape. Chipmunks, shrews, and box turtles are common victims. Some animals such as frogs, toads, and salamanders visit the ponds in the spring to breed and lay eggs, but need to have a way of getting out of the ponds to return to their terrestrial habitats for the remainder of the year.

**Full sun or partial shade?** You will find that different critters will inhabit your pond depending on the amount of sunlight it receives. It is probably most desirable to locate it where it will receive some sun, but not all day sun.

## Caring for Your Pond

The healthiest backyard pond will most closely resemble a natural pond, with plenty of native plants, some debris settling on the bottom, and perhaps a log or branch floating on the surface. A pond with these ingredients should soon balance itself, and algal growth will be seasonal and minimal.

- **Fish and snails** are not necessary, and in fact can be disruptive to the natural balance of your pond. Most fish are very predacious, and can quickly multiply and dominate in the pond environment without the check of natural predators. Snails will generally eat your plants and algae. Essentially, fish and snails may turn your backyard pond into a large outdoor fish tank that could require additional maintenance to keep clean.
- **Pumps, waterfalls, and fountains** can add the wonderful elements of sound and flowing water. Birds are actually attracted to moving water, and provided that they have a place to land, they will be frequent visitors. Moving water is not essential to the health of the pond, but will add additional oxygen.
- **Jump-start your pond** life by adding a bucket of water from a nearby natural pond. One bucket is all it takes to introduce the millions of microbes that help keep the system in check!
- **The depth of your pond** and the area you live in will determine the degree to which it freezes. If your pond freezes entirely to the bottom, plants and wildlife may not survive. If small children play near your pond, you may want to add a fence for safety purposes. Check your local laws and home owner's covenants to see if a fence is required and what maximum depth is allowed.
- **A word of caution:** If you fill your pond with water that is being treated with some form of chlorine, you should consider using a de-chlorinator.



### For more information...

The Natural Water Garden, edited by Colston C. Burrell, is part of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden's 21st Century Gardening Series. This handy paperback is highly recommended. Subtitled "Pools, Ponds, Marshes, & Bogs for Backyards Everywhere," this book provides plans and photos of water gardens of all sizes, plant lists for various regions of the country, and loads of helpful information about planting and maintenance.

The National Wildlife Federation Guide to Gardening for Wildlife, by Craig Tufts and Peter Loewer (Rodale, 1995), and The Natural Habitat Garden, by Ken Druse (Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1994), include extensive sections on backyard ponds, water gardens, and wetlands.