

## A Pond in Spring + tips

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When our children were preschool-aged, we encouraged them to play outdoors as much as possible, and to enjoy nature. To protect them from the sun and rain, we built a large gazebo so they could play, read or even rest outside.

Our neighbours, always enthusiastic to give advice, suggested we build a pond beside the gazebo to enrich the children's interest. They said "make it big and extend it under the gazebo so it feels like you are beside a lake". Being pond novices, we followed their advice and designed a pond slightly larger in surface than the gazebo. We designed the pond to be shallow (less than 60 cm according to the city bylaw).



We were told that we should invest in a good-quality PVC liner so we would not need to worry about the pond's stability and loss of water. It took several years before we could afford such a liner and in the interim, the children played in the depression that was destined to be the pond. Once the liner arrived, we spent hours removing stones and sharp objects and levelling the outer edge of the depression. We did this by using a large level on top of a straight board that reached from one side of the hole to the other. Finally, we laid down the liner and secured its edges with flat field stones. The side farthest from the gazebo was lowered to allow overflow drainage when needed. Then we installed ABS plastic garden edging next to the outer edge of the stones. All this

was done in the spring, just before several days of heavy rain. The pond was soon full of rainwater and within days it was teeming with life – caddis flies, water striders, dragonflies, and frogs. We planted native water lilies (*Nymphaea* spp.), pond lilies (*Nuphar* sp.), and arrowheads (*Sagittaria latifolia*). These were planted in pots filled with heavy clay soil fortified with bone meal and a slow release fertilizer. We lined the porous pots with fabric to prevent soil from escaping and covered the surface with rocks to secure the soil and weigh down the pots. We also added a dozen fingerling goldfish to control mosquitoes. The children were excited to have this new body of water in their backyard and spent hours watching and identifying the aquatic life, swimming with the fish and rowing in an inflated dingy. We never left them unattended and often joined in the activities.

The following spring, the pond was even more abundant with wildlife. There were hundreds of tadpoles. The fish had survived and soon reproduced. A green turtle moved in and basked in the sun on the water lily pads that had successfully overwintered.

As the children aged, they moved from playing in the water to watching the wildlife in the comfort of the gazebo, which matured from a play area to a dining and relaxing site.

The pond changes from season to season. When the ice melts, the water is clear and we can see how many fish have survived. Every spring mallard ducks swim, preen and rest on the rocks. Other birds drink and bathe in the shallow margins. Once the plants have sprouted, dragonflies feed, mate and lay eggs. In the evenings numerous frogs fill the air with their song. Blue herons also visit the pond most frequently in the fall and help themselves to a few unwary fish. Later when the leaves turn, the vivid



autumn colours are reflected in the water and signal the finale of another year of life in the pond.

Over the years we have found native aquatic plants to be the most reliable. Although we have tried many of the more colourful tropical plants, we have only been able to keep them for a few years. Some of the plants, such as tropical water lilies, need to be stored indoors for the winter. Water lettuce and water hyacinths only last one season even though we have tried to keep them over the winter in our indoor aquarium. Some of the native plants are aggressive and need to be trimmed and re-potted at least every two years or so, but this task is relatively easy.

Although we have several pumps and a filtration system, we rarely use them. The surface area is large enough to allow the wind to circulate and aerate the water. We try to keep at least half the pond covered with plants for shelter and shade. Sometimes the water is green and murky but the aquatic life continues to thrive. In the fall, it is easy to skim off most of the fallen leaves and scoop out debris from the bottom with a pool net.

The pond has matured over its 16 years and so have we. Our children have moved away to pursue studies and careers. When they come home for a visit they still investigate the pond. My husband has retired but is often seen having his lunch in the gazebo by the pond, reading a book and keeping an eye out for activity in the pond. Every spring I am anxious for the ice to melt to see what wildlife has overwintered and what might be new for the year.

#### Tips

##### Recommended reading:

A Harrowsmith Gardener's Guide – Water Gardens, 1996, David Archibald and Mary Patton, Camden House Publishing, Ontario.

A Complete Guide to Water Gardening. 1997. Peter Robinson, Reader's Digest, Montreal.

##### Please note:

If you are planning to create a pond, check with your local bylaws to ensure you are compliant, especially if fencing is required. You should also check with utility companies before you dig.

A screen over the pond can keep predators from taking fish and can keep leaves from falling in, especially in the fall. Some ponds need an air hole to release toxic gases in the winter, which may mean installing a water trough heater. There are energy efficient models now available.