







Ponds

WHY?

Fresh water is a gift from God in creation; people, plants and animals rely on it in order to survive, yet freshwater sources are amongst the most imperilled habitats in the UK. According to the Freshwater Habitats Trust, pollution, agricultural runoff, drainage and channelisation mean 92% of ponds in the UK are degraded, and there are no undamaged lowland rivers in England and Wales: https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/FHT-Strategy-booklet_Sep13_web-version.pdft

Ponds, our smallest standing freshwater bodies – punch above their weight in making a positive impact for nature. Even a very small puddle can benefit wildlife!









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HOW?

MINI PONDS: CONTAINERS, PUDDLES AND RAINWATER PLANTERS

Not all churches will have the space or suitable soil to build a pond in the ground. You can still help wildlife by providing a regularly watered puddle, making a container pond or building a rainwater planter.

Puddles provide a source of clean drinking water, as well as baths for birds, which help them stay parasite free. Mud puddles are an important source of building materials for some insects, and for birds such as house martins and swallows.

A pond in a container such as a washing up bowl or disused sink is still hugely worthwhile. In fact anything that is water tight. Container ponds are safer for children and of benefit to all sorts of interesting insects and birds who will come and drink. Ensure that any wildlife that falls in will be able to climb out, so perhaps include a textured ramp to allow this. Make sure you clean containers thoroughly every year to prevent them being a vector for parasites or disease. You will need to keep them topped up in the summer in hotter periods. Collected rainwater is the best option:

https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-create-mini-pond

https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/grow-plants/three-ways-to-make-a-pond-in-a-pot/

Perhaps you don't want standing water at all, or you'd like to reduce flooding? In that case, what about a rainwater planter (like Trinity Lewes in our case study)?

https://www.southeastriverstrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Planter-instructions.pdf







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LARGER PONDS IN THE GROUND

If you do have the space to build a larger wildlife pond set into the ground, a clean water supply, sunlight, shallow depth, and gentle edges are the most important factors to consider. It can be 'natural' or 'formal' and the shape doesn't matter, so be creative! Alternatively buy a fixed-form pond, in which case be sure to dig the matching shape accurately.

Sunlight: Choose a relatively sunny, warm location to help insects such as dragonflies.

Depth: 50% of the pond should be shallow (about 10 cm or less, the depth of the shallows can vary). Most wildlife do not need the deepest part of the pond to exceed 30cm. Froglife recommends having a section at 60cm to protect frogs from extremes of weather in winter. Consider creating a bog garden too, you can do this adjacent to the pond by extending the liner into this area, piercing it and replacing the soil: https://www.froglife.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/JAW2014-for-printing-HLF1.pdf

Gentle edges: These are essential to enable wildlife to escape from the water. You could use some of the soil dug out from the deepest part of the pond to reshape the edges into a gentle slope in order to allow hedgehogs, toads and other wildlife to exit from the water.

Liners: After digging your pond, if you have thick clay soil which holds water, you've finished! If you are on better drained soil, you will need to add a pond liner. Remove any sharp stones from the bottom of the pond to avoid punctures, and you may wish to add a layer of sand to lengthen the life of the liner. Old carpet is used sometimes, but this carries a risk of chemicals leaching into the soil or bacteria congregating on the carpet. Liners are available from a number of suppliers. You can either obtain a pre-formed liner (in which case you have to dig the hole to match) or flexible liners which come in varying sizes and prices of PVC or rubber, the latter being more durable.







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Clean water supply and planting: If possible fill the pond with collected rainwater or wait for the pond to fill itself from the sky. Most tap water is full of nutrients, which is not good for pond life. If you do have to use tap water, allow the water to sit for 1–2 weeks before adding native plants to the water.

Planting and wildlife: Pond plants prefer different situations – some prefer to be submerged, some float on the surface and some marginals prefer to be on the edges or in the boggy area with just their feet getting wet. Be sure to include some oxygenating plants to absorb impurities, and keep the pond clear and algae free. There is no need to bring in wildlife from somewhere else, they will find you quickly enough!

Maintaining ponds: Neglected ponds will quickly become overgrown and disappear, so a little maintenance is needed. The main tasks are to remove algal growth in the spring, keep topped up with water in the summer, protect from falling leaves in the autumn and prevent it completely freezing over in the winter so oxygen can still enter.

Supplementary habitat: Many animals which rely on ponds, including amphibians, need safe, sheltered places near the pond to hibernate or overwinter. It's really helpful to provide one or more of the following nearby:

- Unmown grassy areas
- Woodpiles
- Piles of rubble or stone
- Compost heaps
- Toad abode: https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/nature-on-your-doorstep/garden-activities/makeafrogandtoadabode/

Fish: Fish like to eat amphibian eggs, as well as a wide variety of insects and insect larvae, so we advise against adding fish to your wildlife pond.







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Note on pond risk: Speak with user groups and your insurers so you are all confident the management practices will keep users and children safe around the pond.

LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

The Wildfowl and Wetland Trust has a number of ideas of how to create large and small ponds (including at the bottom of a drainpipe), bog gardens and a rain garden: https://www.wwt.org.uk/discover-wetlands/gardening-for-wetlands

The Freshwater Habitats Trust has masses of information about creating and managing ponds and caring for wildlife in them: https://freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/

For information about habitat management for a wide range of creatures see The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Trust (ARC): https://www.arc-trust.org/habitat-management-handbooks

Or Froglife: https://www.froglife.org/

ARC would love you to report your sightings, and also have several identification guides here: https://www.arc-trust.org/report-your-sightings

CASE STUDIES

Driven by a need to help prevent flooding, Trinity Church in Lewes have installed some rainwater planters – not ponds, but a child–friendly way of supporting biodiversity and reducing flooding. See the separate case study resource.



