



Creating a Water Feature for Wildlife

Summary:

What we call a 'water feature' is just a mini pond. We often find that schools and community spaces are reluctant to create a pond on-site for safety reasons, so we suggest that instead, you consider creating a water feature which can be accessed more safely by young children than larger ponds. This way, children can have more access to the pond and can experience the joy and curiosity in interacting with a wildlife pond and the excitement of watching aquatic life.

This activity is the perfect way to show children that they can make a positive impact on the wildlife in their local environment. This is key if we want to help young people to feel connected to nature and to become proactive about issues such as biodiversity loss.

This is a great activity for several classes to get involved with, or for the eco-team to do!

This activity sheet is aimed at educators, to provide you with information and guidance so that you can lead this activity with your learners.

Key Stage / Age group: It can be easily tailored to any age group - the links below are from the [National Curriculum for England](#).

National Curriculum links (Primary):

KS1 & KS2 - Science

Working Scientifically - please see National Curriculum Guidance for working scientifically objectives

Year 1:

- Plants: Identify and name a variety of common wild and garden plants.
- Animals including humans: identify and name a variety of common animals
- Seasonal Changes: observe changes across the four seasons

Year 2:

- Living things and their habitats: identify that most living things live in habitats to which they are suited and describe how different habitats provide for the basic needs of different kinds of animals and plants and how they depend on each other; identify and name a variety of plants and animals in their habitats including mirror habitats.
- Plants: observe and describe how seeds and bulbs grow into mature plants; find out and describe how plants need water light and a suitable temperature to grow and stay healthy.

Year 3:

- Plants: explore the requirements of plants for life and growth (air, light, water, nutrients from soil and room to grow) and how they vary from plant to plant.

Year 4:

- Living things and their habitats: recognise that living things can be grouped in a variety of ways; explore and use classification keys to help group, identify and name a variety of living things in their local and wider environment; recognise that environments can change and that this can sometimes pose dangers to living things.

Year 5:

- Living things and their habitats: describe the differences in the life cycles of a mammal, an amphibian, an insect and a bird; describe the life process of reproduction in some plants and animals.

Year 6:

- Living things and their habitats: describe how living things are classified into broad groups according to common observable characteristics and based on similarities and differences including microorganisms, plants and animals; give reasons for classifying plants and animals based on specific characteristics.

Time needed: An hour to an afternoon, depending on how big and complex your pond will be.

Location: Outside in a safe spot with partial sun.

Activity links:

We recommend using this activity in conjunction with our [BioBlitz activity](#) so that learners can track how their wildlife pond is attracting wildlife. There is nothing more motivating and empowering than seeing that you can have a positive impact!

Creating your mini pond / water feature

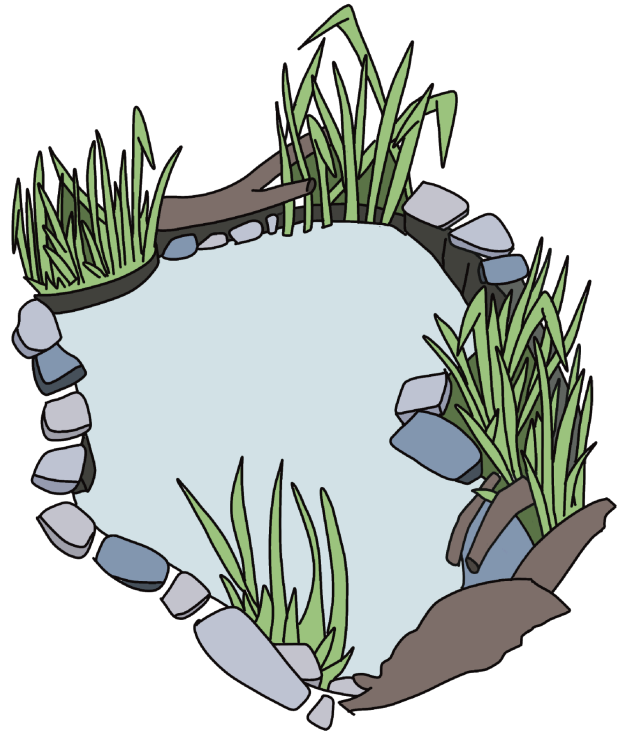
When is the best time to create your mini pond?

You can build a pond at any time of year, Spring is a great time to create a mini pond because you will be able to watch it develop quickly over the coming months.

How to create a mini pond:

You will need:

- A spade
- A container - this could be a washing up bowl, a large plant pot, a half-tank, a baby bath, a garden trug, or a wide bucket. It just has to be able to withstand the outside elements, including frosts.
- Sealant or pond liner
- Rainwater
- Pond-specific soil or grit
- Pond-specific plant pots with mesh sides
- Pond-specific plants - see step 5 for more details



How to:

1) Find a good spot for your pond

- Ideally, choose a space that gets good sunlight, but isn't sat in direct sunlight all day long.
- Make sure the pond is in a safe position that has been agreed with the school's health and safety policy.
- You can either dig a hole to put your container in, or you can place your container on top of the ground. Just note that more creatures can get into your pond if the edges are level with the ground - so if you leave your container above ground, you will want to make a ramp into and out of the pond using sticks, bricks, and stones.

2) Seal any drainage holes and fill the bottom with gravel

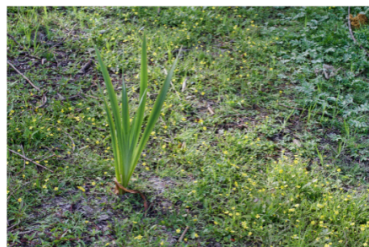
- You can use sealant or pond liner to make sure your container is watertight.
- Then use stones and gravel to make varying depths and a slope so that creatures can climb in and out.
- Do not use soil in the bottom of the pond as it will make the water go green.

3) Fill up your pond

- Use rainwater to fill your pond if possible, as tap water contains chemicals which can be harmful to the wildlife you want to attract.

4) Add plants!

- Once you have your pond-specific plant pots and soil or grit, you can choose a few plants to add to your mini ecosystem! We recommend only using up to 3 plants for a mini pond.
- One plant that is vital for keeping the water clear is submerged pondweed.
- Other than that, we recommend using plants which are native to the UK such as: rigid hornwort, whorled water-milfoil, water forget-me-not, miniature water lily, starwort, flowering rush, lesser spearwort and marsh marigold. There is a great info sheet by The Wildlife Trust which has [more plant](#) ideas.



Lesser spearwort



Mini Water lily



Pondweed

- These are all plants that can provide wildlife with shelter and a perch, and they shouldn't get too big for such a small space. You can find these plants at many garden centres and aquatic shops. You may be able to get a local garden centre to donate some plants for free - it's always worth asking!

5) Caring for you pond

- In the first few months, before you are likely to have many creatures visiting your pond, don't worry too much about algae or blanket weed forming. You can remove blanket weed easily by tangling it round a stick, and once your pond matures and begins attracting wildlife, these creatures will help to keep the water clear.
- You may need to top the water up in Summer - make sure you use rainwater if possible.

- Do not bring in pond creatures from elsewhere - creatures are good at finding ponds to inhabit and you could be disturbing a happy ecosystem or damaging their health by moving them from where they are. Just be patient and keep looking out for new residents in your pond!

Wildlife to look out for in a mini pond:

You can download and keep this Wildfowl & Wetland trust [wetland spotter sheet](#) to reference back too!

- Pond skaters
- Water lice
- Freshwater shrimps
- Damselflies
- Dragonflies
- Frogs
- Although they often prefer bigger ponds, you may even find a frog or newt in your mini pond!
- You could also see your pond being used as a feeding station for birds, bats and even hedgehogs!

See if you can spot any of these in and around the pond!



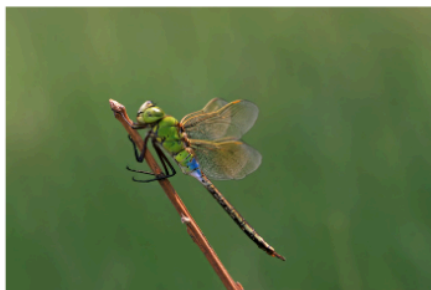
Pond Skaters



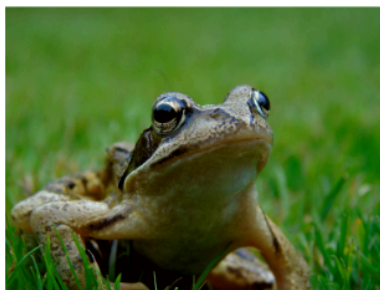
Damselflie



Fresh water Shrimp



Dragonfly



Frogs



Newts

Additional Information:

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

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/nature-on-your-doorstep/garden-activities/create-a-mini-pond/>

<https://www.gardenersworld.com/how-to/diy/how-to-make-a-mini-pond/>

<https://www.wwt.org.uk/discover-wetlands/gardening-for-wetlands/how-to-make-a-mini-wildlife-pond-from-an-upcycled-container/>

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-families/family-wild-challenge/activities/make-a-mini-pond/>

<https://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-01/POND-DIPPING-RGB.jpg>