



# How to make a garden pond

Mature pond in Collie Ennis's garden in Dublin. Note the planks offering perches for birds, dragonflies and other wild creatures. **Photo: Collie Ennis**

A pond for wildlife will greatly enhance your garden. **Collie Ennis** has the details on creating a variety of garden ponds, from large to small, and the benefits they bring for wildlife.

With the continuing decline in amphibian numbers worldwide due to disease, pollution and habitat loss, garden ponds are now more important than ever as a refuge for these charming and unique creatures. Ponds attract lots of other wildlife into your garden too, including invertebrates and birds.

In Ireland and the UK alone it is estimated that up to 80% of breeding ponds and wetlands once used by amphibians as breeding sites have been drained or filled in due to changes in agriculture or urban expansion.

Here, I will discuss a few ways to make your garden more amphibian-friendly, ranging from the simple to the more advanced garden pond set-up.

## Our native amphibians

We have three native amphibians in Ireland: the **Common Frog**, **Smooth Newt** and **Natterjack Toad**.

Irish Natterjack Toads are found only on the Dingle peninsula, Co Kerry, and in County Wexford, where they were introduced to a dune site. They specialise in breeding near sand dunes, so it would be highly unlikely for you to find some in your garden pond, unless you lived close to their

breeding grounds.

Frogs and Smooth Newts are widespread throughout the country, found in from isolated countryside pools and bogs to city centre parks. Unfortunately, their numbers are dropping, particularly in urban areas and particularly around new housing developments where breeding ponds have been drained or watercourses blocked.

COLLIE ENNIS



Collect roofwater in a water butt for your pond.

There are stories of bemused new homeowners finding legions of newts crawling under door frames and letter boxes, trying to reach a breeding pond situated behind a newly constructed row of houses.

If given new opportunities to breed elsewhere, these animals will continue to thrive in and around gardens and also become valuable horticultural allies, feeding on numerous garden pests.

Garden ponds attract more than just our native amphibians. **Dragonflies** and **damselflies** are colourful visitors to ponds during the summer months, laying their eggs in the water; these will hatch and produce large, predatory larvae.

Small native fish such as **sticklebacks** often arrive in the form of eggs on the feet of birds and, if you are very lucky, as I was last year, you may even have a **Kingfisher** drop by to feed on them!

When contemplating putting in a garden pond, four factors must be taken into consideration. Safety, pond placement, pond size and materials.

## Safety around ponds

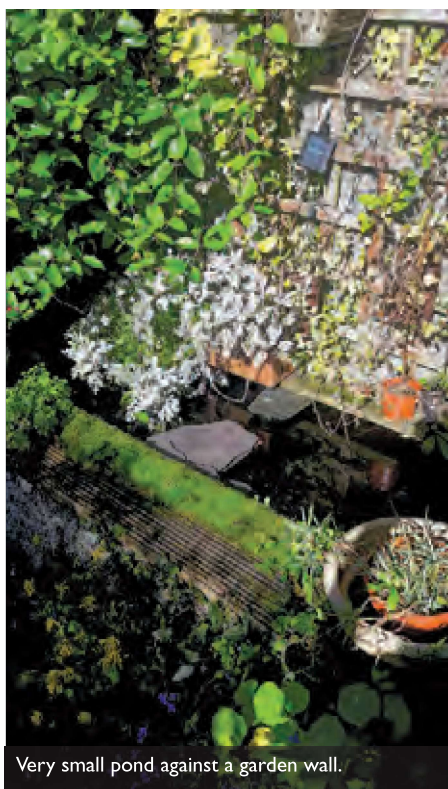
Having any water feature in the vicinity of very young children poses a risk. It would be



Collie Ennis's garden ponds have occasionally attracted Kingfishers. What a joy it would be to see a Kingfisher in your own garden!  
**Photograph:** Andrew Kelly



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Very small pond against a garden wall.

prudent to hold off on putting in a pond if you have a toddler or are expecting a new arrival in the future. If you have an existing pond, and a toddler, then temporarily fencing off the pond until your little one has grown bigger is the safest option.

## Pond placement

Setting up your pond in the correct position is very important. Too much sunlight on the surface and you will be plagued by algal blooms, turning your pond into pea soup and leaving it too exposed for any

amphibian's liking.

Leave your pond in too much shade and it won't get enough sunlight to encourage pond plant growth; it will become stagnant and die.

It's all about getting the right balance of light and shade in your pond; around fifty-fifty shade and sunlight is a good rule to go by.

My own ponds, for example, get the full morning to late afternoon sunshine and are in the shade for the rest of the day. This is the Goldilocks zone for garden ponds.

It's best not to place your pond under overhanging trees or bushes, if possible, as falling leaves will need to be removed or they will quickly clog up the water.

If you have a more exposed area for your pond, with limited shading options, you can always compensate by planting it with

surface-covering water lilies, with tall grasses or irises on the margins. These will help provide cover and shade for wildlife entering or living in the pond and will help to keep the water clear and healthy.

## Materials and pond size

When it comes to pond-building materials and pond size, one will inevitably affect the other. Some people get unnecessarily obsessed with having a large pond, when the truth of the matter is that most amphibians don't care. With many frogs breeding in ditches and puddles on the roadside, a purpose-built spawning area will go down a treat no matter what the dimensions.

Anything from an old, plastic kitchen sink tub to an expensive pond liner from a garden centre can be used, depending on what suits your budget and available space, ➤



Nicely maturing garden pond feature. **Photograph:** Collie Ennis