

How to: Bring water into your garden



Water is such a basic element to life that a wildlife garden would be incomplete without it in one form or another. Used for drinking, bathing, raising young and as a year-round habitat for some aquatic species, water is also enjoyed by many gardeners for its still reflection or the pleasant splashing of a fountain.

Target species

What you attract will depend on how you provide water. A range of birds use bird baths, including blackbird, blue tit and chaffinch. Larger ponds and lakes are where ducks such as mallards and geese can be found. Gardens close to rivers may well attract kingfishers. Bees and wasps can be attracted to the edges of bird baths to drink, this is very important for [honey bees](#).

Garden ponds can be home to a vast variety of aquatic insects including [bugs](#) such as pond skaters, water boatman and backswimmers, [beetles](#) such as the great diving beetle and whirligig beetles, [damselflies](#), [dragonflies](#) [caddis flies](#) and [mayflies](#). Other invertebrates include [pond snails](#), [leeches](#), and [crustacea](#). [Amphibians](#) can include frogs, toads and more than one newt species, and they all need water to breed. [Grass snakes](#) are good swimmers and can be occasionally seen hunting in garden ponds. Flowering pond plants will bring pollinating insects. Ponds with muddy margins are used by bees, wasps and hornets for drinking, while mason bees, swallows and house martins take mud for nesting.

What you could do:

Decide what type or size of water feature suits your garden. Plan out your project before starting, especially if it requires several stages in construction such as a pond or rain garden. There's nothing to stop you creating several different types of wildlife-friendly water features in your garden.

Watering in dry weather

- Watering veg patches and flower beds helps all garden wildlife supplied with food but is wasteful of processed water. You can store some in a water butt, which is ideal for lime-hating plants but rarely enough for the whole garden

Bird bath

- The easiest way to start. See our "[How to guide](#)"

A "pond in a pot"

- This is quite easy to do, and a great way to bring water into a patio or balcony garden. See our "[How to](#)" [guide](#)

"Proper" wildlife pond

- Making a wildlife pond is a significant undertaking, and so we have a special [How-to guide](#) covering this.

Rain gardens

- Rain gardens are designed to sustainably collect and absorb rainwater from the roof. Making one is a specialist activity well described in this [RHS guide](#).

Bog garden

- Bog gardens are areas of soil kept nearly waterlogged. They support a fascinating range of plants and make a good habitat. They are best made in conjunction with making a wildlife pond.

How easy is it to do?

Easy through to hard. The time and skill level required to add water to your garden will depend on what you choose to add. A bird bath can simply be erected, a small bog garden dug, lined and planted in a weekend, whereas a rain garden or large pond will take more planning and time.

How much will it cost?

This will depend on the project. A simple bird bath could be made for free out of a recycled upturned metal bin lid or bought for £12 or more. The more aesthetically pleasing or amusing bird baths are very much more expensive, but the birds are happy with a cheap one! A pond project is likely to cost in the region of £100 upwards.

How effective is it for the target species?

Very effective. Ponds and water features designed well or adapted for wildlife can be very well used.

Things to be aware of

- Watering plants through the summer is an environmentally costly activity. Unless there is a hosepipe ban in your area it is OK to water vegetables and choice flowers but be sparing. It really is not necessary to water lawns, which require huge amounts of water to stay green. If they do go brown, they will turn green again within days of a change to rainy weather
- Keep water butts covered to avoid them becoming a drowning hazard for garden birds.
- Scrub out and refill bird baths regularly to reduce the spread of avian disease. For more info on garden bird hygiene visit this BTO [web page](#)

Things to look out for

Bird poos in the water or white waxy flakes from wood pigeons are tell-tales that your bird bath is being used – and that it needs a clean! Watch and listen for sounds of birds splashing in your pond

Further information

How to: Create and maintain [bird baths](#) www.wlgf.org/ht_bird_bath.pdf

How to: Make a [pond in a pot](#) www.wlgf.org/ht_pond_pot.pdf

How to: Create and maintain a [pond for wildlife](#) www.wlgf.org/ht_ponds.pdf

How to: Improve a [balcony or window box](#) for wildlife www.wlgf.org/ht_balcony.pdf

How to: Improve a [patio for wildlife](#) www.wlgf.org/ht_patio.pdf

Our web pages on water [ecology and habitats](#) www.wlgf.org/water_ecology.html

Our web pages on animals

[Honey bees](#) www.wlgf.org/honeybee.html [Dragonflies](#) www.wlgf.org/dragonflies.html

[Pond beetles](#) www.wlgf.org/pond_beetles.html | [Caddisflies](#) www.wlgf.org/caddisflies.html

[Water bugs](#) www.wlgf.org/pond_bugs.html [Mayflies](#) www.wlgf.org/mayflies.html

[Pond snails](#) www.wlgf.org/pond_snails.html [Leeches](#) www.wlgf.org/leeches.html

[Crustacea](#) www.wlgf.org/pond_crustacea.html | [Amphibia](#) www.wlgf.org/amphibians.html

[Damselflies](#) www.wlgf.org/damselflies.html [Reptiles](#) www.wlgf.org/reptiles.html

Other sites

- RHS [rain garden](#) advice www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?PID=1009
- RHS [Water habitats](#) www.rhs.org.uk/advice/garden-health/wildlife/water-habitats
- RHS [Bog gardens](#) www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=356
- BTO [hygiene advice](#) www.bto.org/how-you-can-help/providing-birds/feeding-garden-birds/hygiene