

Plants for wildlife ponds

GWF480 GRN

Updated March 2006

Stocking your pond with the right plants will add colour and interest, help to maintain a healthy balance and encourage wildlife. We also warn you which ones to avoid.

Plants which are native to Britain and, ideally, to your local area create the best habitat for wildlife. You should not collect wild plants, however, but get them from a garden centre, specialist aquatic nursery or another garden pond. The best time to plant your pond is in spring or early summer. Choose plants from each of the sections below to create the right balance. Purpose-made pond baskets make it easier to keep plants under control. Line them with hessian and fill with heavy garden soil topped with gravel or speciality pond compost. The gravel keeps the soil in the baskets. You should also avoid added nutrients, which can encourage algae.

Oxygenating plants

These plants produce all or most of their foliage below the surface. They are crucial to achieving a balanced pond as they increase oxygen levels and reduce algae through competition for nutrients. They also provide cover for tadpoles, and other pond life.

Curled pondweed

Potamogeton crispus

Hornwort

Ceratophyllum demersum

Water crowfoot *Ranunculus aquatilis* white flowers above water, May-Jul



Key to plant list

Aromatic = aromatic foliage
Colour = main flower colour
Foliage = attractive foliage
Month = flowering period
Nectar = good source of nectar for bees, butterflies and other insects
Scented = scented flowers
Short = under 25cm
Medium = 25-75cm
Tall = over 75cm

Water milfoil

Myriophyllum spicatum

Water starwort

Callitriche stagnalis

Water violet *Hottonia palustris*, pale purple flowers above water, May-Jun

Plants to avoid

Some native plants, such as the white water lily and the greater reed mace or bulrush, are too large, vigorous or invasive for garden ponds and will soon overwhelm them. These are listed in the relevant sections. There is also a small number of imported plants which grow very quickly and have escaped into natural habitats where they cause considerable damage, blocking waterways, choking out native species and threatening wildlife. The worst offenders are: *Crassula helmsii* Australian swamp stonecrop or New Zealand pigmy weed also sold as *Tillaea recurva* or *T. helmsii*; *Myriophyllum aquaticum* Parrot's feather also sold as *Myriophyllum brasiliense* and *M. proserpinacoides*; and *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* Floating pennywort. Other non-natives which should be avoided are *Azolla filiculoides* Fairy fern; *Lemna minuta* Small-leaved duckweed and *Elodea canadensis* Canadian pondweed.

Floating plants

Most floating plants are rooted on the bottom of the pond, but their leaves float on the surface. A few are completely free-floating. They provide shade for pond life and will help inhibit algae and duckweed through competition for nutrients and light.

Amphibious bistort *Polygonum amphibium* pink, July, foliage
Broad-leaved pondweed *Potamogeton natans* foliage
Frogbit *Hydrocharis morsus-ranae* free-floating, white, Jul-Aug
Water hawthorn *Aponogeton distachyos* white, scented, Aug-Sep, foliage
Water soldier *Stratiotes aloides* free floating, white, July

Avoid

Fringed water lily or yellow floating heart *Nymphoides peltata*, White water lily *Nymphaea alba* Yellow water lily *Nuphar lutea*

Marginal plants

These are plants with their roots and lower stems in the water, but which carry most of their leaves and flowers, above the water. Some thrive in fairly deep water, others will only hold their own in the shallows. They are valuable for their attractive flowers, many of which are good nectar sources. They also provide an exit route for emerging dragonflies, and shelter for amphibians in and out of the water.

Shallow water marginals up to 15cm

Bog bean *Menyanthes trifoliata* pale pink, Jun, foliage, short
Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga* vivid blue, May-Sep, short
Lesser spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* yellow, May-Sep, short
Marsh marigold *Caltha palustris* yellow, Mar-Jul, short
Monkey flower *Mimulus guttatus* yellow, Jun-Aug, short
Water forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpiodes* pale blue, May-Jun, medium
Water plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* pale lilac, Jun-Aug, tall
Yellow flag iris *Iris pseudacorus* yellow, Jun-Jul, foliage, tall

Deep water marginals up to 30cm

Arrowhead *Sagittaria sagittifolia* white, Jul-Aug, foliage, tall
Burr reed *Sparganium erectum* green, Jul-Aug, tall
Cyperus sedge *Carex pseudocyperus* brown, Jun, tall
Flowering rush *Butomus umbellatus* pink, Jul-Aug, tall

Avoid

Bulrush or Greater reed mace *Typha latifolia*,
Lesser reed mace *Typha angustifolia*,
Common reed *Phragmites australis*,
Greater spearwort *Ranunculus lingua*

Bog plants

This group contains some of our prettiest wild flowers, and is suited to areas which are always very damp, but are not permanently waterlogged.

Bugle *Ajuga reptans* blue, Apr-Jun nectar, short
Globe flower *Trollius europaeus* yellow, May, medium
Lady's smock *Cardamine pratensis* lilac, Apr, medium
Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria* cream, nectar, Jun-Jul, tall
Purple loosetrife *Lythrum salicaria* purple, Jun-Aug, tall
Ragged robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* pink, May, medium
Water avens *Geum rivale* deep pink, Apr-Jun, medium
Water mint *Mentha aquatica* pink, nectar, Jul-Sep, aromatic, medium

Free factsheets

Gardening Which? factsheets provide detailed information on a wide range of topics:

Pests and diseases - Common problems in the garden and the greenhouse.

Welcoming wildlife - Encouraging wild plants and animals in the garden.

In-depth information - A closer look at a range of topics.

Soil facts - All about different soil types and dealing with deficiencies.

How to do it - Covers the basics in a step-by-step or illustrated formats and advice on creating features to enhance your garden.

Legal - Know your rights in and around the garden

Plants from pips - Encourage children to get gardening

Factsheets are free to *Gardening Which?* members. For a full list, ask for Which? Factsheet GWF424