

Ponds for Wildlife (published 2024-09-28)

By Kate O'Lenic, Master Gardener

Before we wade into ponds, here are October Events you may like:

Welcome Home, a UT series

“Welcome Home is a 4-part workshop series focused on home landscapes in Tennessee. Each class will consist of a presentation featuring 2 speakers and a Q&A session and then a hands-on activity led by local talent.”

Program Dates: Tuesdays in October (1, 8, 15, 22) at 6:30 E / 5:30 C

For details and contact for registration, go to: <https://uthort.tennessee.edu/welcome-home/>

Steel Creek Park Wildlife Weekend – Arts in the Natural World

October 11 & 12

Guided hikes, bird walk, interactive kiosks, mini sessions

For details go to: <https://www.bristoltn.gov/1443/Wildlife-Weekend>

In a previous article, Teresa encouraged everyone to join a rising trend in gardening - to convert lawn area into gardens. There's another trend happening in gardening which is adding a wildlife pond to your yard. Ponds can be wonderful spots for wildlife and can enhance the beauty of your yard with the right plants in and around the pond. This is different from koi ponds that folk embraced some time ago. This is a haven for wildlife to help them thrive and provide you with the pleasure of watching all the animals that visit and listening to the frogs serenade you at night.

You can situate your pond in full sunlight or shade. It can even be partially hidden by shrubs if you choose to make it less of a garden feature. A small pond can provide water for birds and small wildlife, but a larger pond will attract a greater variety of wildlife and provide more opportunity for creating a wow factor in your yard.

Installing the pond can be a DIY project or you can hire it out. It will require digging the spot out unless you have a natural low spot that would work. There are prefabricated pools, but a lot of people opt for using a heavy-duty rubber liner. Larger ponds should have a shallow end and shelves for bog plants. The bottom of the pond needs sand or rocks to provide traction for animals that enter the water.

To make maintenance easier, you can use plants to help keep the water clean. A pump is not necessary. But if you want to really wow your neighbors, create a waterfall. In that case, a pump is needed. What an impact a waterfall can make! The sound of splashing water can be very relaxing. And the birds will love using it as a shower. Keep it simple or go hog wild! There are many videos and how-to books on creating a pond.

Now the real fun part begins. You get to think about the plants in and around the pond. Because you are planning to attract native wildlife, native plants are recommended. The plants are just as important to wildlife as a properly designed pond. There are the plants that surround the

pond to provide shelter for wildlife, including sedges and water-loving plants which also include shrubs and trees. Floating rooted plants, perennials that grow in water, underwater and free-floating plants are also important to the pond's health and beauty. There are also plants that can oxygenate the water and remove excess nutrients.

There is a wide range of plants to choose from. Be sure to study the details of the plants available to avoid non-native plants and aggressive plants that could spread too quickly.

A few examples of various plants for a sunny location include:

For around the pond, think pollinator garden. Black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia fulgida*), cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), milkweed (*Asclepias incarnata*), and aromatic Aster (*Symphotrichum oblongifolium*) are great choices. Add some native decorative grasses for texture, such as switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) and a sedge (Pennsylvania Sedge (*Carex pennsylvanica*)). If you have space for trees, a red buckeye (*Aesculus pavia*) could be nice. Finally, a few shrubs can round out the pond area. Beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*) and sweetshrub (*Calycanthus floridus*) would work well.

Plants in submerged pots include pickerelweed (*Pontederia cordata*), broad-leaved arrowhead (*Sagittaria latifolia*), and American white water-lily (*Nymphaea odorata*).

Underwater and free-floating plants are very helpful in oxygenating the water. A few underwater plants include eelgrass (*Vallisneria americana*), Coontail (*Ceratophyllum demersum*), and common water nymph (*Najas guadalupensis*). Free-floating plants include Carolina water fern (*Azolla caroliniana*) and bladderwort (*Utricularia inflata*). Before adding these, be sure you have a large enough pond. They tend to spread quickly.

Consider creating a pond to entertain wildlife and add a special touch to your gardens. Whether small or large, plain or fancy, you'll enjoy helping wildlife and watching them frolic.

Resources

"Water for Wildlife: Bird baths and Backyard Ponds," <https://extension.psu.edu/water-for-wildlife-bird-baths-and-backyard-ponds>

"Water Garden," <https://grownative.org/learn/native-landscape-plans/water-garden/>

"Backyard Habitat Ponds," <https://sarasota.wateratlas.usf.edu/upload/documents/FA03700.pdf>

"Pools for Amphibians – Working with Wildlife," <https://content.ces.ncsu.edu/pools-for-amphibians>

"Native Plants for Coastal NC Wetlands and Retention Ponds," <https://brunswick.ces.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Plants-for-Backyard-Wetlands.pdf?fwd=no>

For more information about gardening, visit UTHORT's YouTube site for helpful videos:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjS3d1IklH1OZ1Z2qPvhgfQ>

How do I ask a question?

If you have a question for the Master Gardeners, submit them to us on our website at www.netmga.net. Click the link at the top of the page, "ASK A MASTER GARDENER" to send in your question. Questions that are not answered in this column will receive a response from a Master Gardener to the contact information you provide.