

Benefiting wildlife and

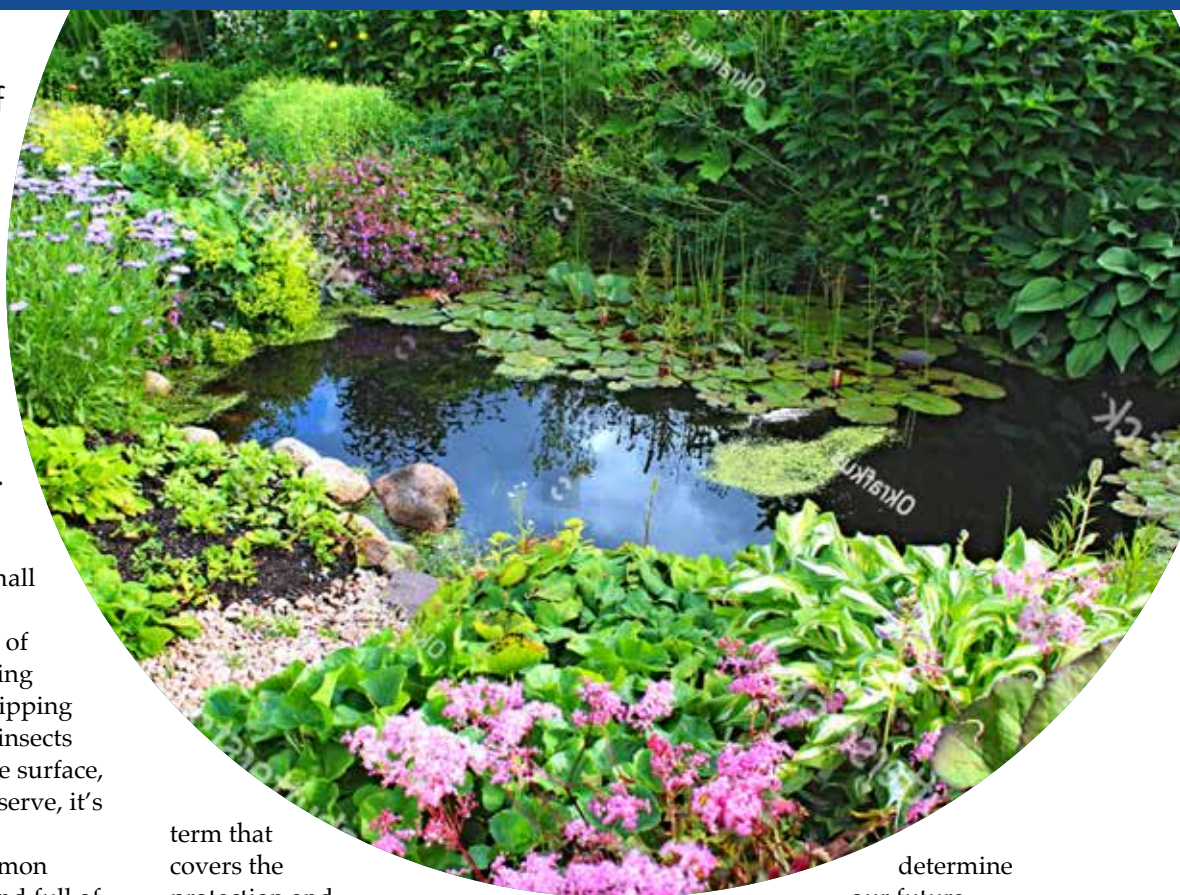
Many of us feed the birds, set out piles of logs for insects or even hedgehogs, pick plants that pollinators like – but adding a pond to your garden can create a striking feature and help fight climate change.

Water, however small an area, brings a whole new level of interest to a garden. Rippling in the breeze, with birds dipping in for a drink, a wealth of insects above, below and upon the surface, and entire life cycles to observe, it's fascinating for all to see.

Ponds are the most common type of habitat on Earth, and full of biodiversity – much more so than streams, rivers or lakes. But Britain lost half its ponds during the 20th century and one in seven UK wildlife species is under threat.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson alluded to this when he launched the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26): “With the natural world under threat, it's more important than ever that we act now to enhance our natural environment and protect our precious wildlife and biodiversity.”

COP26, to be held in Glasgow in November, will gather heads of state, climate experts and campaigners to agree action to tackle climate change. COP25, held in December 2019, recommended ‘nature-based solutions’ to fight climate change – a



term that covers the protection and restoration of ecosystems that can store carbon, mitigate climate change's impact and protect biodiversity.

Post-COP26, there are sure to be many such recommendations. But on your own little piece of the planet, you can take action too. Much more than a quirky feature, a pond can help in the fight against climate change.

It's reckoned that ponds can absorb more carbon dioxide – one of the biggest contributors to climate change – than woodland. In its report *Gardening in a Changing Climate*, the

Royal Horticultural Society

(RHS) says: “Climate change is likely to be one of the defining challenges of the 21st century, and how we respond will not only

determine our future prosperity, health and wellbeing, but also the sustainability of Earth's natural environment.

“Our gardens can help in so many ways, from reducing our emissions and storing carbon to providing safe havens for wildlife and contributing to our health and wellbeing.”

Installing your own pond

A pond is one of the RHS's top recommendations, while The Wildlife Trusts says a pond can support a greater range of wildlife than any other garden feature. And it needn't be large to have a positive impact.

The traditional way of installing a pond is to dig a hole and fit a pre-shaped pond liner, or line the hole with sand then a polyethylene, PVC or rubber lining sheet. You can also build an above-ground brick-



the world with a pond



laid pool. However, if space is at a premium, any waterproof container – a half-barrel, sink or ceramic pot – can support wildlife. You can even have a mini-pond on a balcony.

Ideally, use rainwater for filling, or leave tap water to stand for several hours before adding it and introducing plants.

Whatever the design, remember that small children can drown in a couple of centimetres of water. So consider installing a metal grid over the water, with spaces big enough for a frog to pass through. But avoid netting, as insects and birds may become tangled.

Locate the pond away from overhanging trees or shrubs to avoid excess shade and prevent leaves falling into it. And vary the depth, as a too-shallow pond will heat up quickly in summer, causing oxygen levels to drop, and freeze faster in winter. Float a ball in the pond to help prevent this.

Many garden visitors appreciate a sloping 'beach', or a stone or branch acting as a ramp, to access the water. Submerged vegetation offers shade and protection for dragonfly and damselfly larvae, and helps maintain healthy oxygen levels.

Meanwhile, marginal plants provide an egg-laying habitat for newts. Moisture-loving marginals such as blue-flowered brooklime (*Veronica beccabunga*) and water forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) both provide good egg-laying sites.

Tall stems provide a climbing perch for dragonfly nymphs, and floating plants deter pond weed, which you can wind on a stick to remove.

Consider water soldier (*Stratiotis aloides*), which resembles pineapple leaves and rises and falls within the water. It provides resting and sheltering places for aquatic insects and dragonfly and damselfly larvae.

Water lilies are pretty too, and their

Attracting wildlife

Among the wildlife you may attract are frogs, toads and newts, as well as beautiful flying dragonflies and damselflies.

Common frogs and common toads are the most likely to take up residence. They need still water to breed and lay their jelly-like eggs – frogs' eggs are in clumps, toads' in strings – and their tadpoles usefully feed on algae and later insects.

Give the adults a safe place above the water, perhaps with a half-submerged rock or log, with plants at the pool's edge for safe shelter. Frogs can co-exist with newts, which spend more time in the water.

Britain has three types of newt: crested (rare, protected); smooth (with an orange belly); and palmate (yellow belly). Outside the

FROM TOP: Common frog; Southern Hawker dragonfly; a smooth newt; common toad.



breeding season of April to June they seek out damp shade. Baby newts emerge from their jelly-like eggs towards the end of June and stay in the pond until August, when they take to the land to hibernate until they emerge in February. They become adults and can breed from two to three years.

If you want to encourage amphibians, don't add fish to your pond as they will eat the eggs and young. No fewer than 17 species of dragonfly may breed in ponds from May to September – and even if you don't have residents, you're sure to see jewel-bright, lacy-winged dragonflies and damselflies paying a flying visit at up to 20mph. Neither bite or sting, but they do eat mosquitoes and midges. You can tell which is which by their wings: most damselflies hold their bodies at rest, while dragonflies' are at right-angles.

leaves can be used by bees and other insects as landing pads.

There's always something to see on, near or under the water. So whether

your focus is global issues, the simple pleasure of watching wildlife on your doorstep, or a bit of both, a pond is the perfect addition to your plot. 🐸