

Tiny Oasis on a Shoestring

Even the smallest garden can offer a water habitat for wildlife.

An old dog bed made from a tyre has become an oasis in my new garden. The space around our house is limited, and while I have steadily planted up a bird garden over the past year, I had yet to make a space for frogs and fish. Editor Anno came to the rescue with a gift of the old tyre dog bed, and I set to work. In the space of a few hours, a tiny oasis emerged from the lifeless black rubber. All the materials used were recycled and the entire project cost next to nothing. However, the pleasure it has brought has been priceless...

You could use almost any small container as a pond without going to big expense. Half of the plastic clam shells used for children's sandpits, for example. While plastic liner is a popular solution, it does deteriorate over time, especially when exposed to sunlight making this a temporary solution at best. One dog dashing into your pond can puncture the liner, and your little ecosystem will be gone in a flash. The tyre dog bed is indestructible and will last a lifetime.

I dug a hole deep enough to accommodate the tyre and dropped it in flush with the ground. Because it is so sturdy no river sand is needed as a bed – easier still! A wire basket planted up with an Arum Lily (*Zantedeschia aethiopica*), and Dwarf Papyrus (*Cyperus proliifer* "Nana") serves a dual function – the *Cyperus* is very efficient at using up nitrates in the water – i.e. it will be a perfect natural filter. The Arum (apart from being attractive) is the perfect home for Painted Reed Frogs – those cute little fellows often mistakenly called Tree Frogs. I used potting soil in the home made wire basket and lined it with a piece of old shade cloth to hold the soil. Once planted up, a layer of duzi pebble on top stopped the soil floating out into the pond once lowered into the water. I placed a few small rocks into the pond to provide crevices for fish. The top rock is covered with just 1 cm of water – perfect for a perching frog or a bird looking for to drink or bath.

Two old logs were used. One stands upright in the water, wedged between the rocks to hold it steady. This serves as a perch for birds – I was rewarded the very next morning by two Black-capped Bulbuls landing here to inspect my new creation. I laid the other smaller log across the pond – one end in the water and the other end on the ground. Thus, any small creatures, which inadvertently fall in, will be able to make their way to safety. (Just think of the frogs and mice, even snakes, which drown in swimming pools, having no means to exit the water).

An old submersible pump from a fish pond was put to good use here. I simply placed it in the pond to bubble soothingly while aerating the water. An outside power source is needed to run a pump.

Planting around the pond is purely up to you – have some fun while remembering to plant appropriately for the situation. My pond is mostly in the shade. Looking to soften the harsh black edges of the tyre I used *Streptocarpus*, *Asparagus meyersii*, *Mitriostigma axillare* (Small False Loquat) dripping with fruit, and *Veltheimia bracteata* (Glossy Forest Lily). Because I want the entire pond to be visible from the house, I was careful to plant low growing *Isolepis prolifer* at the front edge. I have large dogs who love drinking from outside water sources so I “paved “ the entrance to the pond with rocks dug in with their flat sides at the surface. *Dymondia margaretae* (our indigenous “mondo grass”) fills in the spaces between the rocks. This portion falls into the sunshine which *Dymondia* needs. This groundcover has green/grey foliage with a bright yellow daisy. If your pond is in a sunny situation choose *Dissotis princeps* for height, and *Dietes bicolor* and the beautiful *Kniphofia* species around the tyre edge.

Once the water had settled, I added a couple of tiny fish. Tyres are known to be toxic, but an old tyre pond in a friend’s garden is home to four generations of clicking stream frogs with no adverse effects, and even tree frog babies have been found among the reeds. I am eagerly looking forward to the arrival of the first amphibians – be they the guttural toads or painted reed frogs; hopefully even clicking stream frogs will choose this little oasis as their home.