

Testing the Waters

FROM THE ENGLISH GARDEN April 2010



Would you consider a natural swimming pond in your garden? Vicky Kingsbury finds out what makes them interesting, how they work, and gets advice from those who have already taken the plunge.

Imagine the scene – enjoying the summer sun with friends and family in your back garden, with the added bonus of being able to swim in the clear, fresh waters of a swimming pond, with absolutely no chemicals. Think of the incredible sense of peace and tranquillity you would feel bobbing about in the water, knowing that while you are relaxing you are also being good to the environment and kind to your skin.

Inspired by nature, the swimming pond was first introduced to the UK at the RHS Hampton Court Flower Show in 2001. Although still a relatively new idea in this

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country, it is well known and extremely popular in Germany, France, Switzerland and Austria, and is considered an environmentally friendly alternative to the traditional swimming pool. Today, the huge success of swimming ponds has spread around the world, with many now found in gardens in the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

If a swimming pond is something you have been considering, then you might be pleased to hear that only basic maintenance is required, as the pond's filtration system does almost all the work. The skimmer or filter system will need emptying every now and then, and any leaves or pond weed on the surface water will need to be collected, but this is no different to a normal swimming pool.

A pond like this is made up of two main



components: the swimming area and the regeneration zone, separated by an internal wall. The regeneration zone contains plants that help purify the water, and also add nutrients and minerals, which after a swim leave you skin feeling clean, silky and smooth – unlike after a chlorinated swim.

The right choice of aquatic plants for your pond is essential, not only for your pond but also to suit the theme of your garden. Good examples include a variety of water lilies, *Phalaris arundinacea var. picta* “Feeseey”, *Gunnera manicata*, *Caltha palustris* and *Pontederia cordata*. It’s important to cut and remove any dated foliage in the autumn to avoid the plant material rotting down in the water and unbalancing nutrient levels the following spring.

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A natural swimming pond is an excellent leisure spot but can also provide a home for wildlife such as frogs, toads, beetles, newts and dragonflies – but don’t worry, they will have left the pond by the time you dip your toes in. Birds come close to the water to drink, while at night local bats find rich sources of food in the insects that live around the edge.

If you already have a swimming pool, pond or lake, you can easily convert it into a natural swimming pond. All ponds are individually designed and have low maintenance costs. There are no attached health risks, they are educational for children and are an attractive



feature all year, as they don't need cover in the winter. So what's stopping you? Get planning now for super summer swims!

Case Study

Sacha Cole has no doubts about her decision to install a swimming pond. 'I first saw the concept in a lifestyle magazine, in an article that gave the case for natural swimming ponds against conventional swimming pools. For me, there really was no contest,' she says.

'We have an old 15th-century barn, which is listed, so we were limited in what we could do. I wanted to be able to sit and look out from the garden and see nothing unnatural. I also wanted the pond to be part of the view that flowed

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Sacha was particularly enthusiastic about swimming with plants, although a few of her friends thought she was mad, to say the least. "They said it would be freezing cold and would cost a lot to keep clean and maintain, but it doesn't. Even my husband was worried to start with, but he loves it now and my children simply adore it. Temperature is not an issue – they just jump in and so do I. The joy of swimming without chemicals is so refreshing."