

How to Manage your Pond Season by Season

BDS Species and Habitat Management Sheet #4



Garden Pond. Photo by Dave Smallshire

Your pond needs care throughout the year – this guide gives details of the best time to carry out specific tasks

Spring

Amphibians should arrive at your pond to breed in early spring and your first damselflies and dragonflies will start to emerge too. Early blooming plants such as marsh marigold and cuckooflower will add colour to the pond and be useful nectar sources for insects coming out of hibernation.

If you want to add any new plants, late spring is a good time to do this.

Summer

If the pond level is getting very low in a hot summer then you can top it up with water from a water butt in the garden. It is best not to use tap water as it contains nutrients which can encourage the growth of algae/ blanketweed. Duckweed may build up over the surface of your pond – this can grow very quickly so it



The Large Red Damselfly is usually the first species to emerge in Spring. Photo by Mark Tyrrell. Marsh Marigolds will add colour to your pond in Spring. Photo by Daniele Muir.

is best to skim it off using a net. Leave it at the side of the pond for a day or two before composting it. This gives any invertebrates caught up in the duckweed a chance to escape back into the pond.

If you do get a build-up of algae or blanketweed, this can be removed by using a cane and twisting the weed around it. Again, leave it at the side of the pond for a few days before composting.



Damselfly emerging from larval skin.
Photo by Daniele Muir.

If problems with duckweed and blanketweed persist, it is likely that the nutrient level is too high. Planting some larger plants should help to use up the excess nutrients.

There will be lots to see in and around your pond over the summer so sit back and enjoy your wildlife!

Autumn

Late autumn or late winter are the best times of year to clear out any excess vegetation. In late autumn many invertebrates will have died off but over-wintering invertebrates and amphibians won't yet be hibernating.

If leaves fall into the pond, remove them with a long handled rake or net. If they sink and decompose they will add nutrients to the water, which can lead to problems with algae the following year.

Large plants such as bur-reeds and bulrush will probably need annual clearing in smaller ponds. Remember to leave them at the side of the pond for a few days before composting them.

Autumn is also the time to submit the records of the dragonflies that you have seen through the summer if you have not submitted them via the website.



This Southern Hawker is a species that is common in garden ponds. This Southern Hawker has just emerged.
Photo by Claire Install

Winter

Keep removing any leaves that fall into the pond. When it's very cold and close to freezing, float a ball in the pond to prevent a small section from freezing over so birds can still have a drink and bathe. It should ensure more oxygen passes into the water too. Don't break the ice as the shock waves can kill hibernating wildlife – a pan of hot water can be used to open a space if the water has already frozen, but pour slowly so that it is a controlled process. When it is snowy, remove as much snow from the pond as is safely possible. Snow can prevent light getting to the oxygenating plants in the pond so oxygen levels fall which is dangerous for hibernating animals.

Late winter is a good time to divide any emergent plants and also clear excess vegetation from your pond. This will be a time when dragonfly eggs should be hatching and larvae will be finishing their resting period. It should be done before the end of February to avoid any newts returning to the pond to breed.



Common Darters are on the wing from May and can be seen as late as December in mild years! Photo by Mark Tyrrell.



Removing vegetation from the pond every few years ensures it has a good balance of emergent vegetation, floating plants, oxygenators and open water. Photo by Daniele Muir.



Palmate newt – newts can easily be seen in your pond using a torch at night, especially in spring.
Photo by Daniele Muir.



Azure Damselfly. Jerry Hoare.

Health & safety around ponds

- Carry out a simple risk assessment and particular note any risks that might be specific to the location. How deep is the water? Are there hazards around the pond or possibly hidden in the water? Are there children helping you? Have you got the appropriate equipment you will need to carry out the intended tasks safely?
- Wear waterproof plasters over open cuts when working around ponds. Always wash hands or use an anti-bacterial gel after working in pond water.
- Avoid ingestion of water.
- Long rubber gloves are useful and can be worn over thin gloves to keep hands warm.
- Waders or thigh-high wellies are useful, or wellies with waterproof trousers over the top (not tucked in!) are a cheaper alternative.
- For management of large ponds, rescue equipment such as a reach pole or throw line should be provided.
- Structures such as dipping platforms should be inspected thoroughly every year.

Darter Larva. Photo by Neil Phillips.

