

Wildlife Ponds

Designing and Maintaining Excavated Wetlands with High Wildlife Values

Habitats for Healthy Waters-Fact Sheet #2

What is a Wildlife Pond?

Wildlife ponds are simply excavated (dug) basins that mimic natural healthy wetlands. They have many of the same features of natural wetlands which explains why they are attractive to so many wildlife species including waterfowl, shorebirds, amphibians and reptiles.

Characteristics of Wildlife Ponds:

- **Shallow with variable depths**-At least 75% of the pond area should be 0.3-1.0 metres (1-3 feet) deep. Bottom should be undulating to encourage a diversity of plant species.
- **Irregular shoreline**-Maximizes “edge” habitat. Straight is not natural!
- **Gentle side slopes**– Establishes transition zones for plants.
- **Wide buffers** (4:1 ratio of upland buffer to pond area) and connection to other habitat features on your property.
- **Secluded location** with little disturbance from humans or pets.
- **Small size**-Remember that bigger is not necessarily better. One acre or less can be attractive to waterfowl and amphibians.



A productive wildlife pond should look very similar to this natural wetland.

Before constructing your pond:

- Think about your objectives for the pond (wildlife, recreation, fish production, etc...)
- Come up with a design concept based on your objectives.
- Use mapping and air photos to help you choose an appropriate location (available at local Ministry of Natural Resources offices).
- Conduct soil tests to ensure the site will hold water.
- Ensure your contractor understands what you want to achieve.
- Call your local Conservation Authority office to acquire appropriate permits!

Where Should a Wildlife Pond be Located?

Suitable pond locations:

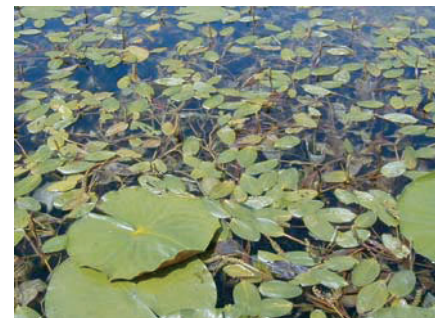
- Where it will fill up: poorly drained depressions with mucky, impervious soils
- Away from dwellings and disturbances
- Ideally associated with other habitat features (woodlots, idled fields, existing wetlands, etc)

Unsuitable pond locations:

- Within existing, defined watercourses (permanent or intermittent)
- Within healthy, functioning wetlands
- Within flood plains or erosion-prone areas
- Where pond will receive excessive nutrient runoff

To Plant or Not to Plant:

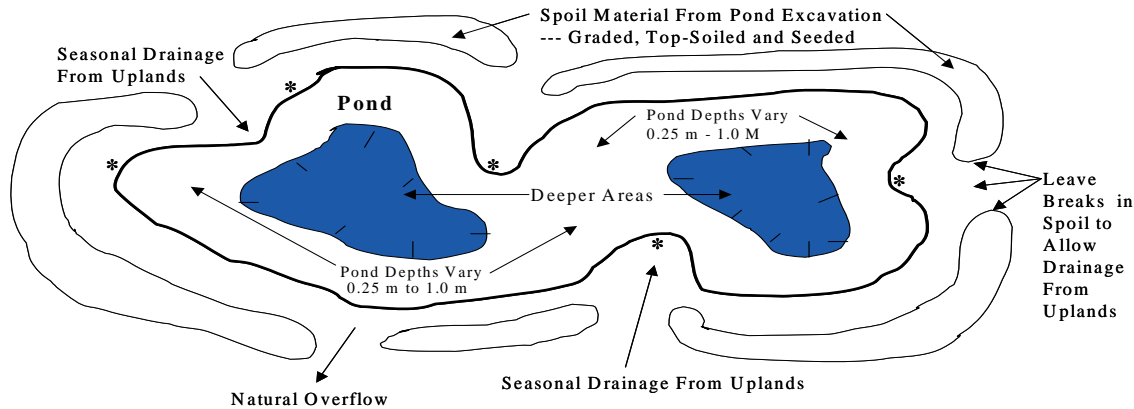
Seeds from aquatic plants will move into your pond over time with wind, water and wildlife. If you want to give your pond a “jump start” you can either purchase native wetland plants from nurseries (can be expensive) or add some muck or seeds from local wetlands, obtained with the landowner’s permission. Do not transfer muck from wetlands harboring the purple loosestrife! This species is non- native and spreads rapidly.



How do I design a Wildlife Pond?

TYPICAL POND PLAN

* Note Irregular Shoreline Configuration *



Need more information?

For more information on wildlife pond designs, please contact Ducks Unlimited Canada and request the "Construction Criteria for Wildlife Ponds" document. Phone: (705) 721-4444

Maintaining a healthy wildlife pond:

Key Point: A properly designed and located pond is usually self-managing however, problems can arise. Always remember to treat the cause and not the symptom!

Wetland vegetation is important to a pond's ecosystem but if you notice an algae problem or an increase in the amount of vegetation (over 75% of the pond area), consider these steps:

1. Prevention-Verify there is an intact buffer, reduce nutrient inflows, check septic system for leaks.
2. Physical intervention: Water-level manipulation, dredging, physical removal of plants.
3. Biological intervention: aeration, barley straw for prevention of algae growth.
4. Chemicals: LAST RESORT! Pesticides are potentially dangerous near water and use is restricted to certified individuals.



Wetland vegetation is an important part of a healthy wildlife pond. Plants contribute oxygen, absorb nutrients and form the base of the aquatic food chain. Use fencing to exclude livestock from ponds to avoid damage to shoreline vegetation.

The "Habitats for Healthy Waters" program is a three-year (2005-2007) initiative to raise the awareness of wetland values among residents of Elgin, Oxford and Middlesex Counties. This project will also help landowners implement wetland stewardship practices that provide benefits to agriculture and the rural community through a series of demonstration sites, workshops and educational material.

Other sources of information:

- Ducks Unlimited Canada Website : www.ducks.ca

For more information on wetlands or "Habitats for Healthy Waters", please contact:

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