

In-depth Advice: Garden Ponds

Parents should check the garden regularly. Containers holding rainwater should be emptied or sealed to prevent children gaining access, and paddling pools should always be emptied and turned upside down after use. Although garden ponds have great ecological benefits, RoSPA advises parents of children aged under 6 years old to temporarily fill them in. Use it as a sandpit, garden, or something similar, until your child is out of the age category when they could drown in it.

Supervision

Almost all child drowning incidents in the back garden or garden pond occurred after a break down in supervision. If parents with children under the age of 6 choose to maintain a garden pond they must be aware that they need to constantly supervise these children in the garden. They also need to ensure that the pond is inaccessible to the child who may escape supervision.

Mesh or grille

Rigid mesh or a grille can be used to create a secure cover for a garden pond. The following points should be considered in having a grille installed on your pond:

- The mesh must be firmly secured and regularly checked for signs of deterioration.
- The mesh or grille needs to be able to support the weight of a child and should remain above the surface of the water at all times. Grilles beneath the surface will not remove all of the risk of drowning especially to toddlers and crawling babies who could still end up face down in water and not be able to get themselves upright.
- Modular interlocking plastic grids that can be made to fit various shapes and sizes of ponds are available as well as steel mesh. Security grille suppliers and metal stockholders can cut steel mesh to size on request.
- The mesh should ideally be heavy duty (i.e. 6-8mm diameter wire) and so be self-supporting. Thinner wire mesh will require supporting with a frame.
- Fencing materials, such as chicken wire, are unsuitable as they will sag in the centre with the child's weight. A number of tragic accidents have occurred when children have managed to crawl beneath wire, or pulled the wire aside. Drowning incidents have occurred in less than 300mm of water.
- The mesh should have a grid size of no more than 80mm x 80mm - this size ensures against entrapment.
- Depending on the size of the pond, a frame may be required to provide stability and anchor points. The frame needs to be sited so that it is clear of the maximum water

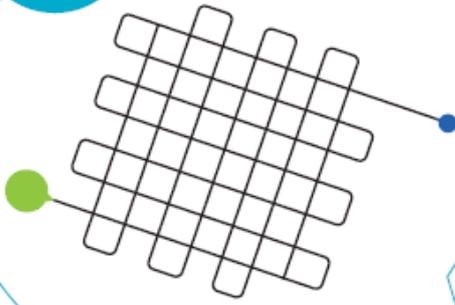
level height that the pond can reach and take into consideration any deflection or sagging that could occur.

- Methods used to secure and lock the frame in place should ensure that there is no risk of entrapment between any moving parts.
- The cover should be left in place until the child can recognise and understand danger.

Fencing

Fencing off the pond is only a partial solution and can often lead parents into a false sense of security. If the pond is fenced it must be of such a height and design that makes it secure, preventing access by young children. This is usually achieved with a vertical railed fence with bars no more than 100mm apart. This barrier should be at least 1.1m in height, following the safety principles of the Building Regulations. If a gate provides access it must be of a similar design to the fence and be kept locked shut. Specific swimming pool gates have been designed with extended latch mechanisms (which are out of reach of children).

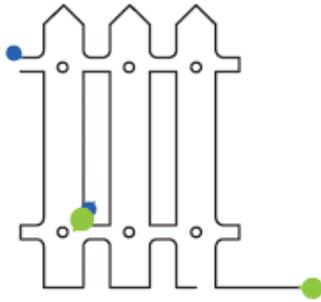
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Cover it!

Covering your pond is a good option for some people - you just need to make sure you use a rigid metal grill rather than flimsy chicken wire. Don't forget to check it regularly to make sure it's up to the job of keeping young children out of the water

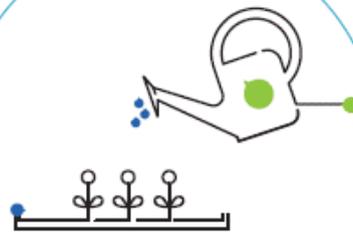
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Fence it!

Another good option, although it can be sometimes give you a false sense of security - particularly as most young children are excellent climbers! If you do choose a fence, make sure it's at least 1.1m and that access points such as gates are kept locked

3



Fill it!

This is the best choice! There are some great options for transforming your pond into something else while the little ones are young, such as a flowerbed, or even a sandpit!