

# Gardening

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### Pond Cleaning



**Presenter: John Patrick [26/08/2006]**

***John says now is the time to spring clean the pond***

Water is a wonderful addition to any garden. It's relaxing to listen to and if you've got fish, that adds another dimension. To enjoy your pond for ever and a day it's important that it has some regular maintenance.

Richard Bell is an expert in pond maintenance. He's been cleaning ponds for about 25 years and says they need a good clean once a year, and winter is a good time to do it.

As Richard says, even the smallest pond is a complex ecosystem in its own right. And for that ecosystem to function effectively it requires the right balance of plants, fish, water pH and water hardness.

"Most houses have deciduous trees and the leaves fall into the pond. We empty the pond, and split and feed the plants. Winter is the best time to do this because if you do it in summer, the plants go backwards. Do it now and they come up beautifully in spring.

"We recycle about 90 per cent of the water into containers. This means we can leave the fish in there for a couple of hours while we clean the pond. When we've finished, we put the water back into the pond and splash it into the tank to oxygenate it."

The first job is to remove the water plants including ***Elodea*** and **water hawthorn *Aponogeton distachyos*** which flowers all winter. Then remove the fish from the pond. To do this put the net in front of the fish and they will swim straight into it. Avoid touching the fish with your hands as dry hands will remove their scales. If touching them is unavoidable, do it quickly and wet your hands in the pond water first.

Any sludge from the bottom of the pond can be poured straight onto the garden because it's full of fish waste, 12 months worth of leaves and other detritus. All of this is beautiful nutrient for the garden.

Next the pond is pressure cleaned to remove what's left of the rubbish.

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Then it's time to revitalise the plants. Remove plants from their pots because they may need dividing. Propagating water plants is just like any other plant.

For example when repotting an **iris**, remove excess roots and clean away the finer root material so that each rhizome is ready to grow.

Cut the leaves back to about 150 millimetres. Put newspaper at the bottom of the pot to contain the soil. It will break down and the roots will eventually grow through.

Into the soil add a soluble fertiliser. **Water lilies** and **irises** are gross feeders, so they need a lot of nutrient. And for long term growth, add some slow release fertiliser.

When re-planting the **irises**, remember they are only small pieces so place them so they are growing towards the centre of the pot. Add a layer of sand to hold them in place. This also protects the soil from coming out into the water.

Pebbles on top look good, help hold plants in place, and prevent fish from pulling out the soil. **Louisiana irises** are beautiful and will give the water a decorative quality through summer. Keep flowering plants away from waterfalls or fountains because they don't like the splash. And add plant oxygenators, like **Vallisneria** and plant these next to **water hawthorns** or **water lilies**. They like shade and the bigger flowering plants will create that for them. **Irises** prefer shallower water than the other plants.

You don't need to add any chemicals to the recycled water from the pond. However if you were using tap water, Richard recommends adding some salt in the water. "Normally a pond of 1,500 litres would need about a kilo of salt", he says.

There are a couple of things you should remember about ponds. Children can drown in shallow water, so make sure the pond is in a protected area - protected by a fence, or in a courtyard where access isn't easy. Also remember that many water plants can become weeds. When you cut them back make sure that the pieces removed are disposed of appropriately so that they don't become weeds in our native system.

**Further information:**

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