

SMALL PATIO POOLS

A small pool for a patio or courtyard garden reflects light into your space and draws in birds and other wildlife, even in a tiny area. Adding some plants helps to keep the water weed-free and clear, while baskets or pots provide landing stations for frogs and birds that come to take a drink or bathe. These little ponds are very easy to set up and should take only a few hours to install.

CHOOSING AND SITING

A PATIO POOL

Select a watertight container that is at least 30cm (12in) wide and deep – the bigger the better, as the presence of more plants will help to regulate the

water temperature and limit weed growth. A watertight half barrel is ideal for a patio feature, but check before you buy that it has not contained toxic liquids – a traditional beer or whisky barrel would be perfect, or one bought from a nursery and designed for garden use. Some traditional oak barrels may leak at first but will become watertight as the wood swells, so fill yours and wait for a few days. If it still leaks, you will have to add a pond liner. Line the barrel, add water, which will push the lining into place, and tack it at the top with round-headed stainless steel nails.

Glazed, frost-proof containers without drainage holes also make beautiful features for patios. If yours has a hole in the bottom, try plugging it with a wine cork or add a pond liner or sheet of recycled plastic to make it watertight. The water and plant baskets will help to keep the liner in place.

Tiny pools will heat up very quickly, so set yours in part shade, choose plants that are happy in cooler conditions, and keep the water topped up.

TOP TIP BEFORE PLANTING UP, SET YOUR BARREL OR POT WHERE YOU INTEND TO KEEP IT BECAUSE IT WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT TO MOVE ONCE FULL OF WATER AND PLANTS.

Site small patio pools in part shade so that the sun does not heat up the water too quickly and accelerate weed growth.



A half barrel makes a beautiful patio pool and will accommodate a range of easy-care plants to attract wildlife.



Divide water lilies and other pond plants that have outgrown their baskets by using a knife to slice through the roots.

POTTING ON

After a couple of years, some of the plants in your mini pond may outgrow their baskets and need to be divided or planted in a larger container. In spring, remove the plant from its basket: the roots will have grown through the holes, so you will need to carefully cut the plastic container with a sharp knife or scissors to extract the plant. Then, using a sharp knife, slice through the root ball and repot a healthy section in a new basket of the same size, or plant it up in a larger basket that will accommodate it (see *opposite* for planting instructions). You can give away the unwanted sections or compost them, but never dispose of pond plants in another water source without prior permission.

HOW TO MAKE A CONTAINER POOL

YOU WILL NEED Frost-proof glazed container • Stiff brush • Wine cork (optional) • Pond baskets • Aquatic compost • Selection of compact pond plants (see *below*) • Gravel • Colander or sieve

- 1 Clean the inside of the container with a stiff brush and rinse with fresh water. Do not use soap or detergent, which will pollute the water. If your pot has a drainage hole, use a wine cork to make it watertight. Fill the container with water to about 5cm (2in) below the rim using rainwater from a butt or, if using water from the tap, leave it for a day or two before planting to allow the chlorine to dissipate.
- 2 Choose a pond basket with small holes in the sides. Add a layer of aquatic compost to the base. Carefully remove your pond plant from its original container and place it on the compost in the centre of the basket. Fill in around the plant with more aquatic compost, gently firming it down to remove large air gaps. Wipe off any duckweed or algae on the leaves of the plant with a clean cloth.
- 3 Place some gravel in a colander or sieve, and rinse it a few times under a tap to remove dust and impurities. Apply a 2cm (3/4in) layer on top of the compost to help prevent it from escaping and muddying the water.
- 4 Add the basket to the glazed pot. Do not worry if the leaves of a waterlily are submerged at this stage – they will soon float to the top. If planting marginals that prefer shallow water, stand them on stones or bricks to raise their baskets to the correct pond depth (see their plant labels for this information). Add about three plants to a container 45cm (18in) wide. Scoop out pond weeds with a small net from time to time.



AQUATIC PLANTS FOR A PATIO POOL

Marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*) • Miniature water lilies (*Nymphaea odorata* var. *minor*, *Nymphaea 'Pygmaea Helvola'* and *'Pygmaea Rubra'*, and *Nymphaea tetragona* are all good choices) • Blue flag (*Iris versicolor*) • Japanese water iris (*Iris ensata*) • Slender club rush (*Isolepis cernua*) • Corkscrew rush (*Juncus effusus* f. *spiralis*)



Iris ensata 'Rose Queen' is a compact marginal ideal for a patio pool, producing pink flowers in summer.