

Garden pond plants inhabit different planting zones, at a range of water depths. Here, floating pads of waterlilies arise from a rhizome, often in deeper water on the bottom of the pond, while some marginals, such as blue-flowered *Pontederia*, grow positioned on a deep shelf. On a shallower shelf, at the boggy poolside margins, purple-flowered *Lythrum salicaria* thrives.



Anemopsis californica



Lythrum salicaria thriving in wet soil streamside.



Iris pseudacorus

A 'pond edge' is where water meets land, an environment found in nature where rivers or streams flood, or by a pond that naturally fills and dries out with the seasons. These areas may be under water at some times of the year, wet mud at others, and they are often the habitat of many beautiful and garden-worthy plants.

By contrast, many garden pools and water features – kept within a flexible membrane or cast fibreglass liner, the outside edge set into paving or turf – are quite self-contained. Gardeners may plant shallow-water, pond-edge plants to help soften the effect and blend a pond into the garden, yet pond edges can be inspiring features in their own right. They make wonderful habitats for wildlife, and if you can create a continually wet, bog garden area beside the pond, you can enjoy lush planting both in the water and at soil edges, with a range of choice pond-edge and marginal plants.

Pick of the plants

Plants that grow successfully with roots in water or wet, muddy soil are essentially pond plants, their roots adapted to being submerged. Different marginals grow in a range of water depths; some for pond edges tolerate a maximum of 5cm (2in) of water

above their crowns, but others also thrive at lower depths.

The water-plant year begins with *Caltha palustris* (marsh marigold), a UK native with masses of large, five-petaled, buttercup-like flowers in April, although there is also demure, white-flowered *C. palustris* var. *alba* and double *C. palustris* 'Flore Pleno'.

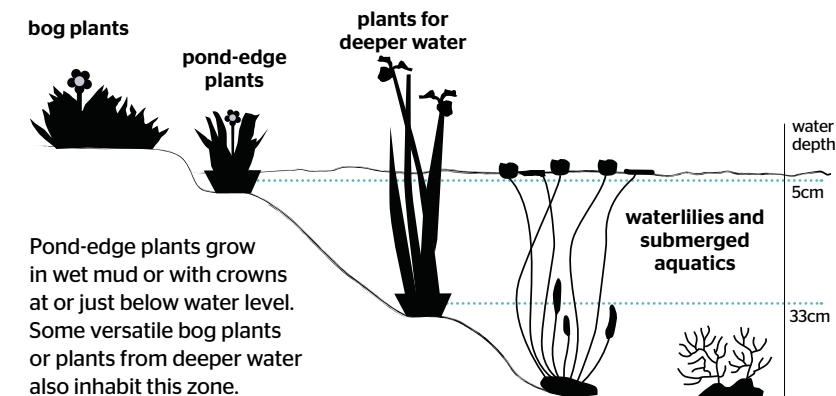
These are followed by the statuesque, upright, blade-like foliage and distinctive flowers of water iris. Showy *Iris versicolor* has flowers mostly in shades of plum and purple, while Louisiana irises, which comprise various species and hybrids, have large, flattish flowers in many colours: *Iris fulva* with unusual orange-red blooms is an example. These thrive at shallow pond edges. Native *I. pseudacorus* (yellow flag) is versatile, thriving in moist soil or water. All *Iris* add colour and height (60–120cm/2–4ft depending on species) in May and June.

Also in June begins a special treat: the fragrant cream flowers of choice *Anemopsis californica* – its six, petal-like bracts surround a cone of tiny flowers. Blooms appear for months above foliage that may flush red in autumn. This plant needs wet mud, its crown at or near water level.

At 90cm (3ft) tall native *Lythrum salicaria* (loosestrife) has many small, vivid pink flowers on sturdy erect stems. Plants with upright >>

Pond planting depths

Planting depths are approximate; those given relate to water above the crowns of plants, rather than depth of planting shelves.



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Making wet feet an asset

For some plants, consistently wet or even submerged soil is a requirement for success. Pond or stream margins offer this in nature, but with planning even a modest garden pond can incorporate a bog garden with luxuriant planting

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Pond-edge plants

growths such as this add a means of escape for damsel and dragonfly larvae to emerge and become adults.

Upright growth is complemented by the rafting growth of several native plants. *Mentha aquatica* (water mint) **5** has aromatic foliage and, in summer, lilac, globular heads of flowers, while *Veronica beccabunga* (brooklime) **1** produces fleshy growth, shining foliage and masses of tiny, dark blue flowers. With pretty five-lobed leaves, *Potentilla palustris* (marsh cinquefoil) **9** has maroon, star-shaped summer flowers. Non-native *Gunnera magellanica* **11** is a plant for muddy pond edges, a tiny version of better-known giant *G. manicata*, with leaves just 2cm (1in) wide and minute flowers, then orange seeds on a spike.

These all scramble horizontally across wet soil or the water surface, linking and blending the two areas. They also form habitat opportunities for amphibians as they exit ponds into the boggy emergence zone.

As summer progresses

After midsummer the elegantly drooping, fragrant yellow or orange flowerheads of *Primula florindae* **3** and aromatic *Mentha cervina*, with its small leaf and round, purple or white flowerheads, add colour and fragrance.



Juncus ensifolius and *Veronica beccabunga*.

Growing on the edge

Boxed numbers in the text refer to the following pond-edge plants

- 1** *Veronica beccabunga*
- 2** *Iris pseudacorus*
- 3** *Primula florindae*
- 4** *Typha lugdunensis*
- 5** *Mentha aquatica*
- 6** *Lythrum salicaria*
- 7** *Cyperus eragrostis*
- 8** *Juncus ensifolius*
- 9** *Potentilla palustris*
- 10** *Anemopsis californica*
- 11** *Gunnera magellanica*

✦ Photographed 29 July 2015 at Waterside Nursery, Leicestershire.

Foliage and seedheads are just as important – *Carex riparia* early in the season has 5cm (2in) black seedheads, while later *Juncus ensifolius* **8** has 5mm (3/16in) dense, round, black seedheads. Evergreen *Cyperus eragrostis* **7** has stems topped by radiating leaves, like the spokes of a parasol, and interesting seedheads summer to autumn. For a large pool, *Typha lugdunensis* **4** has bulrush-like heads that last through winter. Many pond-edge plants are UK natives – few are new introductions, but *Primula florindae* was grown as a moisture-loving perennial before it was found to survive in shallow water.

In deeper water

Other plants accept far deeper water above their crowns; used with pond-edge plants the poolside display can be impressive. With 12–33cm (5–13in) of water above its crown, blue (or white)-flowered *Pontederia cordata* >>



Iris pseudacorus 'Variegata' and *Orontium aquaticum*.



Mentha aquatica flowers.



Pond-edge plants in a container pond.

Pond-edge plants

(pickerel weed), or lovely native *Butomus umbellatus* (flowering rush) with pink flowers atop 90cm (3ft) stems are superb in summer. Exotic *Thalia dealbata* has bold foliage and wiry stems of purple flowers to 1.8m (6ft); planted below water it survives most winters. For slightly deeper water, to 40cm (16in), try *Orontium aquaticum* (golden club) with curious yellow flower spikes and lance-shaped leaves.

Planting and care

Basket-grown plants can be placed on the correct pond shelf at almost any time of year – except when the pond is frozen; the same goes for bog gardens, although remove plants from baskets at planting. Bare-root pond plants are sometimes sold; plant these in baskets so their roots can surf the water for nutrients. Use an aquatic compost, which is a loam/clay mix (without peat), and plant between March and August.

The growth of rafting edge plants may need to be curtailed; if you cut back once in midsummer you can use stems as cuttings to make extra, young, fresh plants for next year. Divide upright-flowering plants every three years – ideally after flowering to establish good roots before winter. Divide later-flowering plants in spring as new growth begins to show.

Remove soft foliage and stems from the plants in or near the pond edge before winter (to just above the water surface) so they do not drop in and decompose, adding unwanted nutrients to the water. New growth will appear when the water temperatures rise in spring.

Plants for shallow pond edges and wet bog areas offer diverse heights, growth habits and flowering periods that can be mixed to create an interesting and wildlife-friendly emergence zone both in and around the edges of a pond's water area. ●

More from the RHS For more information including a list of plants for a wider range of different water depths, search 'Pond plants' at www.rhs.org.uk

Plant diversity

For a community of plants to thrive, it is important to include different planting depths in and around a pond, maximising diversity.

All ponds should be constructed with shelves or platforms to allow for planting in all depths of water. Make each shelf wide enough to place more than one basket of pond plants to form a larger companion planting group. A narrow rim around a pond will be difficult to plant in a natural-looking arrangement.

For baskets of pond-edge plants, shallow planting shelves about 11-14cm / 4-5in deep are ideal. Such plants are able to survive frost and ice, and help make a pleasing transition between the shallow pond shelf, the sloping cobble area of a pond beach and the wet bog garden area beyond.

Deeper shelves (at 14-22cm / 6-9in, or even up to 44cm/17in) are ideally positioned at the back of the pond, and many of the plants suitable for these deeper areas tend to also be taller.

These plants grow in this deeper water to protect their crowns from surface frost and ice. As well as those mentioned, try native *Alisma plantago-aquatica* and *Cyperus longus*, while *Iris pseudacorus* will grow well in a range of depths.

Bog gardens

A wet bog garden can be dug separately to the pond, and even added to an existing water area to create a new planting environment and habitat zone.

Dig a straight-sided hole, maximum 60cm (2ft) deep, and line with a water-retentive membrane, but pierce a few holes with a fork to allow some water to



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This richly planted pond (above) shows the diversity possible, with purple *Lythrum salicaria* at the back and yellow *Primula florindae* in the foreground in moist soil.

drain out. Add a 7cm (3in) layer of gravel to the base and fill with topsoil mixed with an aquatic soil, which should allow the soil to stay permanently wet. Do not use multipurpose compost. Some ideal plants for bog gardens include *Hesperanthe coccinea*, *Eriophorum angustifolium* and *Carex pseudocyperus*.



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RHS / TIM SANDALL

If digging a pond, ensure wide shelves are included for planting (above). Yellow- or orange-flowered *Primula florindae* (left), here on a gently sloping pond 'beach', will grow in shallow water as well as a bog garden.

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