



EXTREME MAKEOVER



Do you have a huge, empty swimming pool in your backyard? This can be a very depressing site. Is your swimming pool costly, high in maintenance and chemical use and, worse still, no one swims in it anymore? What to do? Here is an idea that more and more people are doing – converting their swimming pool into a pond.

IMAGES Calinda Anderson



It is hard to tell it was ever a swimming pool!



Calinda Anderson



Planting at the right depth ensures a natural look.

THE CONVERTING PROCESS CAN BE AS SIMPLE AS TURNING OFF ALL POOL filtering equipment, and then once the chlorine has evaporated and the water goes green, adding your fish. If your pool was salt water, it's the same process. Readily available fresh water fish such as koi, goldfish, silver perch, trout, marron and yabbies are happy in slightly saline water (up to 5kg of salt per 1000L). Barramundi can tolerate a lot higher salt content.

As most swimming pools provide a large body of water, you won't need to worry about filtering if you keep your fish stocks relatively light. It is not uncommon for people to turn off all chlorinators for winter, when no one swims, then adding some trout that grow throughout the winter months. They harvest the fish in spring and then convert the water back to a swimming pool for summer.

The downside to this is you have to accept that a body of water not being filtered will be green. But this is not a worry to the fish, they will be quite happy. Filtering swimming pools the same way you would filter fish ponds is not really viable, particularly if you choose to convert to save money. Instead, here are two methods that can keep the water at an acceptable clarity.

1/ Consider using beneficial bacteria such as Lysofoss and Splosht. Adding sufficient quantities of bacteria will keep the water healthy, smell-free and generally clear enough to see the fish. You will need to add the bacteria regularly in small quantities. This is a healthy, non-chemical solution to clearing water and can be used in any body of water where you want to grow fish and plants. Transforming green water to clear won't happen overnight; you will need patience.

2/ If you want to see clear water quickly and you like the sights and sounds of running water, then you can install a pond pump (they are low power-use and well-priced) and a UV clarifier. UV clarifiers work on killing all single-celled algae, causing it to clump and form a large particle that can no longer suspend in water. You will need to situate the pond pump in the pool, underwater. Use flexible pipe connected to the pump and send the water out of the pool via the skimmer box, that way you won't see pipe work. Position the UV clarifier where the skimmer box or pool filter was. The water will pass through the UV clarifier and back to the pond via the existing pipe work. The pond pump and UV unit can operate 24 hours per day. Unlike swimming pool pumps, pond pumps cost a lot less to run and are rated to operate continuously. This method should give you acceptably clear water throughout the year. >>

The main challenge with swimming pool conversions is providing places for plants to grow, as pools are too deep for water plants to sit on the bottom. With a base that slopes to the deep end, keeping things from sliding to the downwards is also a challenge.

You can get around this by placing extra large pots, plastic outdoor tables, crates or anything that can house plants at the right level. Water lilies are happiest around 50cm-1.2m deep and marginal water plants prefer 20cm-50cm. Keeping them up at the right level is crucial for good growth. The more plants you grow, the more natural it will look and the healthier it will be.

If you still have salt in the water, the plants won't tolerate more than 2-3kg per 1000L. Check the salt content prior to planting, because water plants are a key component for the long-term health and the overall aesthetic appeal.

With any of the above methods, converting the pond back into a swimming pool can happen at any time by removing the plants and fish then restarting your pool filtration equipment. You can be back to swimming pretty quickly – mind you, there is nothing stopping you from swimming in your fish pond!



A. Filling the new pond with gravel; a big task, but with big rewards. B,C. Before - a disused pool ready for conversion into a pond. D. The completed pond.

If you think there is no way you will want to use it as a swimming pool again and you are committed to a full conversion into a pond, then the best investment you can make is to fill most of the pool with gravel, leaving around 1m of water depth. You will need to fill it with small gravel, preferably 4-7mm in diameter. The benefits to doing this are that you will no longer be dealing with huge depths, the sloping base won't be an issue and you can step in and walk around in the pond, giving you easy access to deal with and position plants. The gravel base will provide a large area to harbour beneficial bacteria and you will be reducing the overall volume of water, making filtering with standard

pond equipment successful. I know many people who have converted pools to ponds over the years. One of the more successful to date is a lovely couple from Perth who now have a backyard they are really proud of. Daryl and Leanne have beautified their pond with a great selection of plants. They removed the capping along one side of the pool and installed a large plant filter. This assists in keeping the water clear and healthy and goes along way in disguising what was once a standard swimming pool. The jetty looks picture perfect and is a welcoming place to sit and view the spectacular koi, goldfish, guppies and the ever-burgeoning population of tadpoles and frogs that re-affirm the health of the pond.

GARDENING > Aquaponics



Darryl and Leanne fully committed to the converting process by adding 10 cubic metres of gravel to reduce depth and volume. They took a step further with the addition of a bio filter made from a converted water tank for extra aeration. When cleaning these filters, the excess chemical-free and nutrient-dense water goes onto their garden. All these measures have ensured their water has stayed crystal clear, healthy and with thriving plants and fish. Their backyard now gets used more than ever, providing a place of peace and beauty to sit, relax and enjoy. 🌿

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