



COOL POOL



The modern concept of wild open water swimming might well suit some Suffolk enthusiasts but for those not up to mud and boggy river bottoms there's something much more beautiful – the swimming pond. **Anne Gould** finds out more

The joy of swimming in the open air with the sun on your back has long been extolled by poets, writers and in song. Historically this was as much about jumping into a nearby lake, pond, river or even the sea in the height of summer to cool off as “taking the waters” for any supposed health reasons. Then along came swimming pools that brought us, with their turquoise blue, a sort of Mediterranean tonic - albeit with an overwhelming whiff of chlorine, discarded corn plasters and who knows what else lurking below.

Of course for some a private swimming pool in your own home has always been regarded as a sort of magic luxury but the reality is that these are not maintained without cost and regular “housekeeping.” The swimming pond, however offers an alternative and perhaps the best of both worlds for people who simply love to swim. Without a doubt they are extraordinarily beautiful additions to your back garden, come summer or winter landscaped with stunning plants, sculptures and hand-made fittings to make the most of the seasons. ➤



Photograph: Richard Bloom

They attract wildlife like kingfishers, dragonflies and, if you are lucky, swooping swifts and swallows who will dive to drink on the wing but you will also be able to swim in tranquil and visually stunning surroundings. But, as Paul Mercer, from the Swimming Pond Company explained they are chemical-free and environmentally friendly too, a huge bonus which means that getting the science right – using the right plants, biological systems and machinery is crucial.

A landscape and garden designer Paul says his passion for swimming ponds was inspired by years of travelling and in particular visits to South Africa – diving into icy natural rock pools surrounding by lush colourful vegetation and stunning scenery. But it wasn't until one day some years ago when he happened to open a magazine and see a feature about European swimming ponds that he decided to specialise. "Swimming ponds first became popular in Austria and Italy in the 1980s and since then the idea has spread across the world."

They are designed to have two zones – a deeper area for swimming that's dug out to a depth of your choosing – Paul's pond at his home in Bressingham is 1.5 – 2 metres. There's also what's known as a regeneration zone – that's the same size as the swimming area but only 20cm deep. Together they make up



an ecologically balanced and self-cleaning pond, he says. "In nature lakes, ponds and pools are kept clean by a combination of plants and micro-organisms including beneficial bacteria. Organic waste matter is broken down by the action of these micro-organisms into substances that plants can absorb in the form of nutrients. "Swimming ponds use this concept. The shallow regeneration zone is a biological filter and is planted up with a wide range of aquatic plants. It is separated from the swimming zone by an internal wall which terminates around 20cm below the pond surface, thus allowing free movement of water between the two zones and ensures the swimming area is kept free of vegetation." Paul says despite the divide, one still feels surrounded and immersed in plants, while swimming in uninterrupted life enriched water.

Of course depending how hardy you might be, the option to swim is there every day of the year (wetsuits optional) but the water temperature depends on the weather. In summer you might achieve somewhere between 25-28°C but as it drops to single figures in winter it might just be preferable to catch the view from the deck instead. Paul says as people become more familiar with swimming ponds he's getting increasing number of calls from across the country and world from people interested in taking the plunge.

So for those who are debating a swimming pool or pond – here's a first-hand view from one of Paul's clients; "Over the last thirty years, we have had both types of conventional swimming pool at different properties – a large outdoor pool and a smaller indoor pool. Both pools required a great deal of effort and expense to keep clean and disinfected. When we bought our present house in Suffolk, we thought again about swimming pools and an old friend who is an architect suggested we should look at swimming ponds, as he felt that one would fit in so well with our lovely old listed vicarage which is also in a conservation area. It really is one of the best decisions we have ever made. Crystal clear water with no chemicals, beautiful plants all around as you swim, easy to keep looking good and wonderful to look at whatever the season and whatever the weather. Unlike a conventional outdoor pool, which has to be covered from autumn to late spring, this pool is always open and a very attractive feature in the garden. Swimming is a joy. Our grandchildren love using a mask and snorkel to see the various small creatures which share the pool with us as well as jumping in and swimming and one of the nicest things is to watch the swallows in mid-summer as they fly down and skim the water to drink."

INFORMATION

www.theswimmingpondcompany.co.uk