



Pools paradise

The clear waters of a swimming pond can be a beautiful landscape feature and a wildlife sanctuary



Top, Paul Mercer's swimming pond at Bressingham and above, a watery retreat at Higham

It's easy to see the appeal of swimming ponds. Floating around in crystal clear water, surrounded by reeds and lilies, with dragonflies hovering overhead, you are at one with nature.

Such a natural setting makes taking an alfresco dip rather inviting. And since wild water swimming has become very popular in recent years owning a garden pool might be the best way to do it on your own terms.

Paul Mercer first dipped a toe into the world of natural swimming pools after studying and then working in landscape and garden design. He says: "Anyone who has ever enjoyed swimming in a natural rock pool on a hot summer's day will speak of a feeling of liberation and of connecting to the natural world that is simply not achieved in a

swimming ponds



conventional swimming pool. The natural swimming pond can recreate those feelings but in a garden setting. It was one thing to have a beautiful pond in the heart of the garden that could look good for 12 months of the year, but to be able to swim in it too... well, who needs to fly to the Mediterranean?" Paul who owns the Swimming Pond Company has a particularly lovely 'show pool' at his Bressingham home.

"Not only can we swim in it on warm summer days, but we get to look at it all year long," he points out. "Even in the middle of winter it can look quite magical.

We have a large oak deck that extends over the water and it is lovely just to sit and observe the life, not only within the water – the newts and whirligig beetles, for example – but also above and around it, such as colourful dragonflies and birds dropping by to bathe and quench their thirst."

But won't many people still prefer the more regimented, creepy-crawly and vegetation free garden pool?

Paul explains; "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 into substances that plants can absorb in the form of nutrients. It is this natural occurrence in nature that is fundamental to the swimming pond concept."

"Swimming ponds are essentially made up of two merging zones, which together, make up an ecologically balanced and self-cleaning pond. Each zone is roughly equal in size and referred to as the regeneration zone and swimming zone respectively. 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 ensuring the swimming area is kept free of vegetation."

The Swimming Pond Company, installation costs start at around £50,000 +VAT for an 80 sqm swimming pond, which has a swimming area of 40 sq m, but doubling the size does not double the cost, since the cost per square metre reduces as the area increases. Running costs only amount to the power for a small circulation pump, which would run 24 hours a day from early March through to early November.

"Providing there is enough space, a swimming pond can suit most homes. We design ours so they sit easily within →



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Top: This pond with decking merges into the surrounding countryside at Hargham, Norfolk



All ready for a dip - a tranquil pond at Booton, Norfolk

→ their surroundings and reflect the character of the property.”

Although each project is different typically it might take about 8-10 weeks to install a pond, says Paul. He offers a design service that will guide the client through the entire process, from conception to completion.

“Many factors need to be considered, such as the size and depth of the swimming pond, access to and from the water, whether the sound of running water is required and so forth,” he says.

“But the ultimate aim is to design the swimming pond in such a way that it blends harmoniously into the garden and its surroundings, while being linked to the home in a stylish manner.”

Paul tends to design and build in Suffolk and Norfolk and is currently working on a pond at Bury St Edmunds which he says will look amazing.

■ For anyone considering a swimming pond for their garden check out www.theswimmingpondcompany.co.uk or to find out more and discover why swimming chemical free water is such a joyful experience, you can visit the show swimming pond at The Swimming Pond Company, Carpe Diem, Common Road, Bressingham, Diss, Norfolk IP22 2BD by appointment. Tel. 01379 688000.