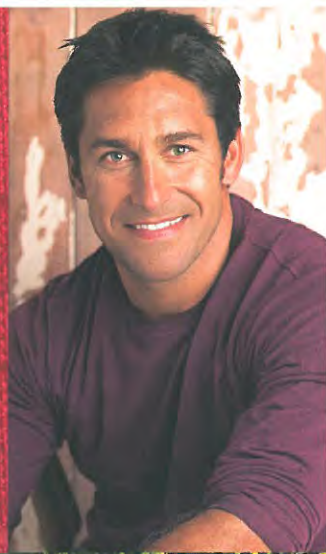


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with jamie durie



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PRINCE OF PONDS

FROGS NOT ONLY ADD LIFE TO A GARDEN, THEY ARE ALSO A PRECIOUS PART OF MANY ECOSYSTEMS. HERE'S HOW TO START YOUR OWN BACKYARD FROG GARDEN AND GIVE BACK TO NATURE

WORDS Christina Larmer

For some people, the chorus of frogs rising from their backyard each evening is reason enough to put in a frog garden. For others, it's the intrigue of watching tadpoles miraculously morph into frogs. But for Phillip Johnson, an award-winning sustainable landscape designer, it's all about putting back. "Years ago when Europeans first arrived and started clearing the landscape, they drained and filled in many wetlands and billabongs," says Phillip. "I'm trying to recreate billabongs in backyards. They're the perfect habitat for frogs." Jamie Durie adds that developers are also being drafted to increase frog populations. "A lot of developers are now required to include wetland areas in landscapes to encourage their growth," says Jamie. "Frogs are an integral part of many ecosystems."

Billabongs are more than a great breeding ground for an increasingly threatened species, they're a stunning addition to any garden, providing a water feature, an ever-changing landscape and a microcosm of the country. That's why we should call them gardens rather than ponds, says frog expert Johnny Prefumo.

"You need a holistic view of frogs because they live in air, land and water," says the environmental biologist also known as 'The Frog Doctor'. "The beauty of having a boggy area with your pond is that it attracts birds and is a haven for butterflies, native bees and other insects that pollinate,

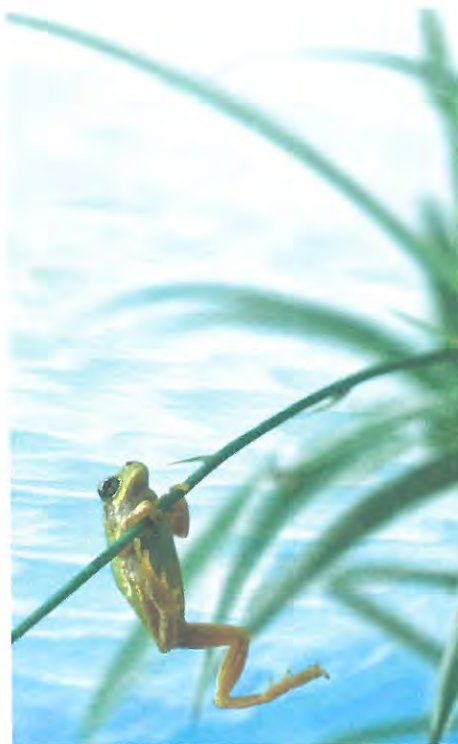
as well as pest controllers like praying mantis." Planting your veggie patch nearby means that crops will thrive too as frogs eat pests such as snails and most flying insects.

Of course, not everyone enjoys the sound of frogs, so it's a good idea to create your habitat away from bedroom windows and neighbours. You should also check regulations with your local council and wildlife service. If your pond is deeper than 30cm, you may need a restraining fence or meshing, and if frogs don't come on their own, you may require a licence to introduce them.

When handling frogs, Johnny cautions, take care: they have sensitive skin and hate being patted. Cup them under the belly or place your hands in sterile freezer bags first. "Frogs need shelter, protection and a wettish environment, so it's about getting that balance right," says Phillip. "Do your research, get the right materials and design something that's individual to your yard."

Good design also discourages cane toads and other predators: the toads prefer closely cropped lawns to dense vegetation. "Aim for a vegetation buffer in and out of the water as well as rocks and logs they can hide around," suggests Phillip.

Now is the ideal time to get digging: the soil is warm and incoming rains will help establish plants before the next breeding cycle. "Instead of listening to traffic noise," says Johnny, "why not listen to a chorus of frogs?"



ABOVE: Native frogs are under threat, with 27 of Australia's 208 known frog species facing extinction, according to Government statistics. But local councils are helping to change this. "One development in Victoria was only approved when the Growling Grass

Frog habitat had been worked into the design – they're native to the area and their numbers need to increase," says Jamie. **OPPOSITE:** Find out how you can help increase the tadpole population in your area at frogsaustralia.net.au

"WHILE YOU'RE SLEEPING, FROGS ARE CREEPING AND FEEDING ON THE THINGS WE CALL PESTS: SNAILS, CRICKETS, COCKROACHES"

~ Johnny Prefumo, 'The Frog Doctor'



How to create the perfect pond

- 1 Dig a hollow in the soil with sloping walls, a flat base and at least 50cm deep in one spot. Remove rocks and sharp objects, then thinly spread gravel or washed sand on the bottom.
- 2 Place a lining of black UV-resistant plastic sheeting over the sand. Turn plastic edges over the pond's rim and weigh down with rocks.
- 3 Put potted aquatic plants in the shallowest area and cover their soil with sand.
- 4 Fill the pond with rainwater or tap water (stand for 1–2 weeks to evaporate chlorine).
- 5 Add frog-friendly fish (see next page) and wait for your frogs to arrive! If you're introducing tadpoles, make sure they are at least 15mm long so they don't get eaten.



1

Create the right habitat

According to frog expert, Johnny Prefumo, your backyard frog habitat will need:

- Half to three-quarter sunlight in winter (for breeding) and morning or dappled sun in summer to reduce the number of mosquitoes.
- Partly submerged logs, rocks and gravel for shelter and basking/perching/foraging sites for frogs, birds and insects (the main diet for frogs).
- A gutter downpipe that enables rainwater from your roof to flush and fill the area.
- Native shrubs and groundcover around the pond for protection and to attract birds and insects. Use prickly plants and small colourful flowering plants from your local nursery. Avoid Grevillea and Bottlebrush that attract European bees and aggressive nectarvorous birds.
- Native aquatic plants that provide shelter for tadpoles and fish, anchor the soil and oxygenate the water. Avoid invasive Water Hyacinth, Duckweed and Salvinia, and only allow plants to cover a third of the pond's surface.
- Mozzie-gobbling native fish such as Pygmy Perch, Rainbow Fish or Native Gudgeon, and local stream insects such as Backswimmers and Damselfly larvae. Avoid Goldfish, Mosquito Fish and Plague Minnow that are harmful to frogs, tadpoles and their spawn.
- Algae-zapping native freshwater crayfish, snails, fish and water lilies. Avoid fish food as it degrades the water.
- Never use pesticides or herbicides in or near your pond. 🍷

1 Not only for the tropics, water lilies come in two varieties: hardy and tropical. The hardy coral pink *Nymphaea* 'Colorado' flowers from October to March, while the tropical *Nymphaea* 'Blue Aster', with its dark purple flowers and

variegated leaves, blooms a month or so later.

2 Frogs and their habitats are an endless source of fascination for kids.

3 As amphibians, frogs love the water, but need a range of comfy spots between wet and dry.



2

Easy pond options

Three pond styles for your backyard:

USE AN EXISTING TUB Try a paddling pool, old laundry tub or baby bath. Ensure it holds water, is toxin-free and has a ramp made of tree branches, rocks, logs and gravel.

BUY A PRE-CAST POND Find a fibreglass pond at a hardware shop and put in a UV-stabilised plastic or 0.5mm PVC liner. Add a circulating pump and fountain. Make sure the pump has a pre-filter to prevent tadpoles from being sucked up or cover the filter with fine mesh.

LAY OF THE LAND Save water by choosing a low section of your backyard where water collects naturally and extend a rainwater downpipe to it.



3