

Making a water feature

A water feature can create an oasis in a corner of your garden, and building one from scratch is surprisingly easy to do

Moving water transforms the ambience of a garden. Whether it's a simple bubble pond or a spectacular cascade, the sight and sound of flowing water can be mesmerising. It is important to site your feature carefully, as once the water feature is up and running, mistakes are costly in both time and effort to put right. The ideal position is in a partially shaded spot, sheltered from strong wind, where the feature can be appreciated at close range.

What you need

All recycling water features, ie those that circulate water from a reservoir via a pump through a decorative feature, are constructed in a similar way and are easy to put together. They can be free-standing, flush with the ground or a wall-mounted feature.

The basic kit comprises: a reservoir, which is filled with water; a submersible pond pump (plus attachments if you are creating a fountain effect). You'll also need tools for digging out the hole if the reservoir is below ground, and a spout with extra hose if the out-flow is elevated above the reservoir, and a nearby electricity supply. Although the submersible pump continuously recycles water, the reservoir will need topping up, especially after spells of warm or windy weather. The reservoir need only be large enough to house the pump, but larger reservoirs require topping up less often.

Water features generally use pumps which run off low-voltage electricity, so you don't even have to go to the trouble of installing outdoor electricity. Just remember

they must be plugged in indoors, and always an RCD (residual circuit breaker). If you already have a socket outside or are thinking of installing one, see overpage for practical advice on pumps and outdoor electricity.

Building a simple feature

You can build a simple water feature in less than a day and for under £100, unless you opt for expensive rocks or a millstone, which could double the price.

Shopping list

- ❖ Small pump
- ❖ Butyl pond liner and reservoir tank or pebble-pool reservoir
- ❖ Steel mesh
- ❖ Cobbles

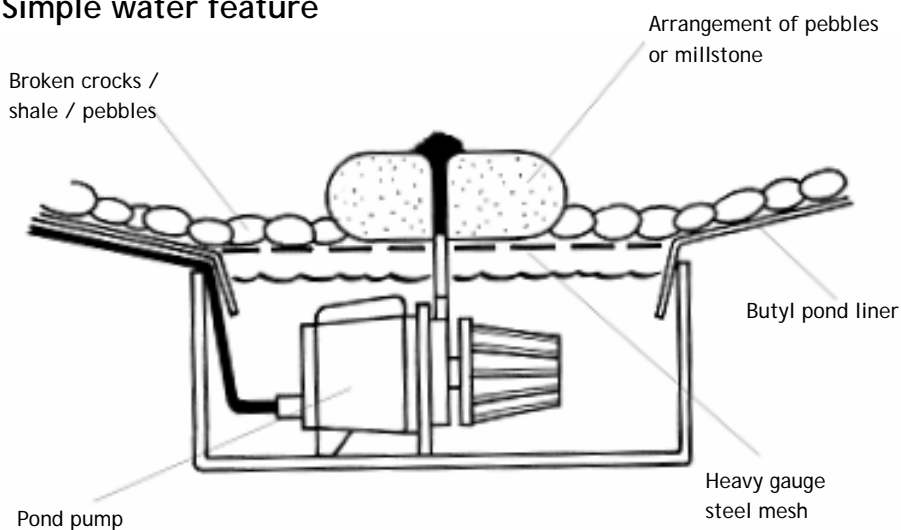
Construction

First dig in your reservoir. This may be part of a ready made pebble-pool kit or a container and pond liner as shown in the diagram left. Cover the reservoir with heavy gauge steel mesh and supporting timber if needed.

Attach a pipe to the outlet of the pump, and pass it through the mesh to the fountain head. Position the head and arrange some stones so that the head is held in place and can't be seen.

The flow rate will need to be adjusted by a valve on the outlet pipe of the pond pump so that water sprays out of the fountain, washes over the stones and back into the reservoir.

Simple water feature



Building a raised water feature

Although a little more expensive, a small, raised water feature with a wall-mounted fountain head can be built in less than a day. It costs from around £120, depending on the cost of the fountain head and whether a free-standing reservoir tank is used.

Shopping list

- ❖ Medium-sized pump
- ❖ Reservoir tank
- ❖ Steel mesh
- ❖ Fountain head
- ❖ Cobbles
- ❖ Length of hose

Construction

The reservoir needs to be large enough to house the pump, and may be a pre-formed tank or butyl liner sunk in the garden as described before, or a free-standing one. If free-standing, you could choose an attractive container such as a lead (or lead-

look) water tank, or large ceramic pot. Otherwise it can be concealed behind a low wall or arrangement of pots and plants.

Place the pump in the tank and attach a long piece of flexible hose to the outlet pipe. Cover the tank with a piece of steel mesh and thread the hose through it. Then run the flexible hose up to the fountain head. Disguise the unsightly pipe work by running it behind a batten attached to a fence post. If constructed against a wall, embed it into the brickwork. To complete the deception, train a fast-growing climber up the wall or fence to conceal it.

Cover the steel mesh with a layer of pebbles. Adjust the flow rate (by a valve on the outlet pipe of the pond pump), so that water sprays into the reservoir.

Choosing a pump

A mains submersible pump (one that sits in the reservoir) is best for all

but the very largest features. They are safe provided any connection to the mains is waterproof and an RCD is fitted.

The size of pump you need will depend on its intended use. All pumps state the flow rate in litres (divide by 4.5 to get gallons). Thus a pump with 3000 in its name will push out 3000 litres an hour. Bear in mind this is without any restrictions like a fountain head or a plastic pipe, which will cause the flow rate to drop.

It will also drop as you raise the end of the output tube. Thus a pump that will deliver 200 litres a minute, only delivers 175 litres a minute to the top of a 2m waterfall, 140 litres a minute to 4m and so on. The pump should state the maximum head it will achieve and give a guide to flow rates at different head heights.

Outdoor electrics

Water and electricity are a potentially lethal combination, so make sure that any mains supply to the garden is protected by an RCD, preferably at the house fuse box. If the water feature is close to the house or an outbuilding, run the wire from the pump into the building, fit an RCD plug and plug it in indoors. Run the wire through a length of plastic conduit to protect it from accidental damage.

For a water feature further down the garden, you'll need an outdoor power point nearby. At one time this would have involved armoured cable, special fittings and the services of a professional electrician. Now you can buy lengths of armoured cable with all the fittings wired on from most good DIY stores. A box goes on the outside house wall and a cable is fed through the wall, fitted with an RCD plug and plugged into a convenient socket. At the other end of the armoured cable is either a junction box - you have to wire the pump into this - or a waterproof socket to take a plug.

