

Creating Frog Friendly Landscape Ponds



Frog Habitat - Wisconsin is home to 12 species of frogs, all of which require standing water for breeding. Some species, such as the wood frog, can begin breeding as early as March in a warm year while others, such as the Blanchard's cricket frog, breed later in the summer. The green frog, American bullfrog, and mink frog typically (although not always) require large permanent waterbodies for breeding because their tadpoles take 1-2 years to develop; however the remaining 9 frog species in Wisconsin routinely utilize smaller waterbodies for breeding, such as landscape ponds. For additional information on Wisconsin's frogs, please visit the Department of Natural Resources web site: dnr.wi.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/herps.asp?mode=table&group=Frogs.

Pond Recommendations - If you are considering creating a landscape pond and would like to make it as frog friendly as possible, please follow the recommendations below. You will not need to add frogs to the pond once you have it completed, they will find new suitable habitat very quickly, often in as little as 1 year! With a smaller pond and fairly uniform habitat nearby, you can expect 1-4 species, however with a larger pond and a variety of habitats nearby, you could expect up to 6-8 species throughout the year. Different frog species call during various times of the year, so frogs in your pond may spread out their calling throughout the spring and summer.

- The size (surface area) of the pond is not extremely important (although typically the larger the better), however, irregular borders or curvature to the shape of the pond are beneficial and create a variety of microhabitats and areas of shelter. Landscape ponds with a depth of 2-3 ft (or deeper) are ideal.
- Place the pond adjacent to natural habitat (e.g., wooded areas, savannas, wet meadows, prairies), when possible, rather than an area surrounded by manicured lawn. Most frog species attracted to landscape ponds will not use them year round, instead they prefer ponds where they can breed and then return to nearby natural habitat to forage for food. However the eggs that are laid will turn into tiny larva or tadpoles within a few days or weeks and the tadpoles will remain in the pond for several months as they metamorphose into adult frogs.
- Ensure there is an easy way out of the pond for all frogs, especially American toads and other non-treefrogs that can't jump or climb well. One option is to not line the pond edge with rocks, however if you prefer to have rocks, include several areas where there are stepping stones or a gradual ramp for the frogs to get out.
- Do not add fish to the pond. Fish are one of the primary predators of frog eggs and tadpoles. Large fish may also predate adult frogs.
- Maintain as much aquatic vegetation (including emergent, submergent and floating vegetation) as possible. Aquatic vegetation is used for attachment of eggs for some species, food for tadpoles and shelter for all age classes.
- Fountains or other water features are not necessary for frog ponds. The filters on these devices can entrap eggs, tadpoles and adult frogs. Tadpoles do need some oxygen in the water while they are developing, but if there is aquatic vegetation present, this is usually enough to keep the dissolved oxygen in the water at sufficient levels.
- Frogs are very susceptible to many chemicals due to their permeable skin. Limit (or prevent) the use of pesticides, herbicides, etc. in or near the pond.
- Please be sure that you are following all DNR wetland/waterway permit requirements when constructing any type of pond.

