



TINY OASIS on a SHOESTRING

By Jenny Dean

Winter time in particular, highlights the importance of water in urban gardens. They need not cost much to make. Jenny has recycled an old dog's tyre bed to make this beauty!





An old dog bed made from a tyre has become an oasis in my new garden. The space around our house is limited, and while I have steadily planted up a bird garden over the past year, I had yet to make a space for frogs and fish. Editor Anno came to the rescue with a gift of the old tyre dog bed, and I set to work. In the space of a few hours, a tiny oasis emerged from the lifeless black rubber. All the materials used were recycled and the entire project cost next to nothing. However, the pleasure it has brought has been priceless...

You could use almost any container as a pond without going to big expense. Half of the plastic clam shells used for children's sandpits, for example. Many books and magazines advocate using a sheet of thick plastic to line your pond. However plastic deteriorates over time, especially when exposed to sunlight making this a temporary solution at best. One dog dashing into your pond will puncture the liner and your little ecosystem will be gone in a flash. The tyre dog bed is indestructible and will last a lifetime.

I dug a hole deep enough to accommodate the tyre and dropped it in flush with the ground. Because it is so sturdy no river sand is needed as a bed – easier still! A wire basket planted up with an Arum lily (*Zantedeschia aethiopica*) and dwarf papyrus (*Cyperus prolifer* "nana") serves a dual function – the *Cyperus* is very efficient at using up nitrates in the water – i.e. it will be a perfect natural filter. The Arum (apart from being attractive) is the perfect home for painted reed frogs – those cute little fellows often mistakenly called tree frogs. I used potting soil in the home made wire basket and lined it with a piece of old shade cloth to hold the soil. Once planted up, a layer of duzi pebble on top stopped the soil floating out into the pond once lowered into the water. I placed a few small rocks into the pond to provide crevices for fish. The top rock is covered with just 1 cm of water – perfect for a perching frog or a bird looking for to drink or bath.

Two old logs were used. One stands upright in the water, wedged between the rocks to hold it steady. This serves as a perch for birds – I was rewarded the very next morning by two Black capped bulbuls landing here to inspect my new creation. I laid the other smaller log across the pond – one end in the water and the other end on the ground. Thus, any small creatures, which inadvertently fall in, will be able to make their way to safety. (Just think of the frogs and mice, even snakes, which drown in swimming pools, having no means to exit the water).

An old pump from a fish pond was put to good use here. I simply placed it in the pond to bubble soothingly while aerating the water. Should you have to buy a pump (submersible of course) it will set you back about R 150. I had an outside power source into which I could plug the pump.

Planting around the pond is purely up to you – have some fun while remembering to plant appropriately for the situation. My pond is in the shade. Looking to soften the harsh black edges

of the tyre I used *Streptocarpus* spp., *Asparagus meyersii*, *Mitriostigma axillare* (Small false loquat) dripping with fruit and *Veltheimia bracteata* (Glossy forest lily). Because I want the entire pond to be visible from the house, I was careful to plant low growing *Isolepsis prolifer* at the front edge. I have large dogs who love drinking from outside water sources so I "paved" the entrance to the pond with rocks dug in with their flat sides at the surface. *Dymondia margaretae* (our indigenous "mondo grass") fills in the spaces between the rocks. This portion falls into sunshine which *Dymondia* needs. This groundcover has green/grey foliage with a bright yellow daisy.

Once the water had settled I added a couple of tiny fish. Tyres are known to be toxic, but I hope this one is old enough to be non-toxic – time will tell. I am eagerly looking forward to the arrival of the first amphibians – be they the guttural toads or painted reed frogs; hopefully even clicking stream frogs will choose this little oasis as their home.

Previous page bottom from left: Painted Reed frog, fishing spider, ©Elaine Kool, Clicking stream frog eggs on rock

