

If you do find any amphibians please send your records, including species, date and location (postcode or map reference), and type of site (e.g. garden, field, wasteland), to ecorocker@gmail.com

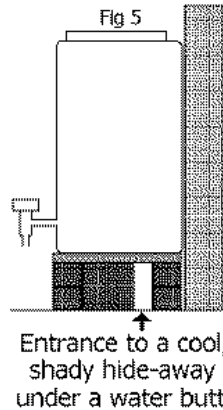
Fig 4: Frog & Toad Summerhouse



If you have any damaged, clay flowerpots these could be set on their sides on the soil under leafy shrubs in a cool, damp area of the garden. If the conditions are right, frogs and toads will hide away in them during daytime in the summer (Fig.4).

Shallow dishes of water under the shrubs will also be appreciated by amphibians. If you find gnats & mosquitoes breed in them, empty and refill them every week.

A water butt raised on bricks and paving stones, so you can get watering cans under the tap, will also provide a good place for amphibians in the summer if it is on the shady side of the house. Build the butt supporting platform like a small room with an opening towards the back (Fig. 5).



Frogs, toads and newts feed on a variety of insects, slugs and small snails, so are a great benefit to gardeners. Your efforts in making your garden more amphibian friendly will be amply repaid, and you will be able to observe them a little more closely than you might in the open countryside.

The Buckinghamshire Amphibians and Reptiles Group has lots more information on their website – go to www.bucksarg.org.uk

Wycombe Wildlife Group

Among its activities Wycombe Wildlife Group surveys and promotes the management of wild habitats for the benefit of wildlife and advises on and promotes wildlife gardening.

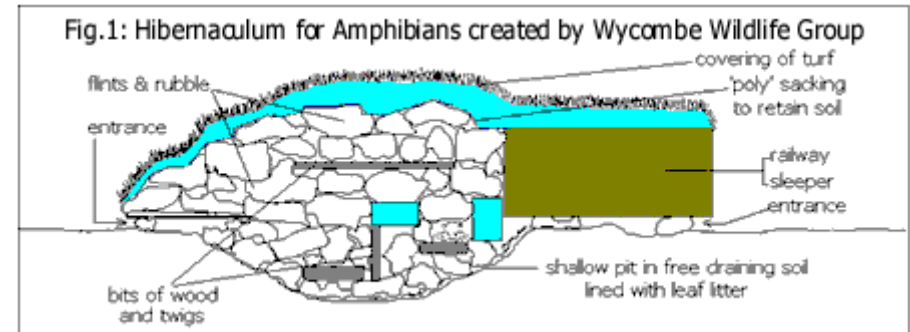
Information about the Group can be obtained from the Group's web site at: www.wycombewildlife.org.uk

Gardens for Amphibians



Amphibians: - frogs, toads & newts, need three essential things from their habitat, **food; water** in which to breed and to keep them moist and, as they are cold-blooded animals, a **cool, damp place** in which to hibernate during the winter.

For hibernation they need somewhere that will protect them from freezing and where they can hide away safe from predators that might eat them while they are in a state of torpor.



The construction recommendations for the above hibernaculum for amphibians is based on an interesting and informative article by a member of a local wildlife group in Newport.

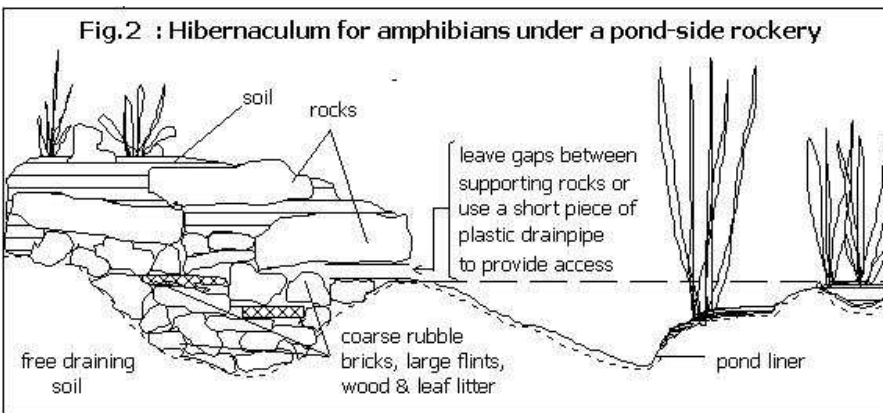
Dig a shallow pit and fill with large pieces of angular rubble, flints, bits and pieces of wood and leaf litter. Pile more rubble & flints on top to create a mound which should then be covered with some old, rot-proof 'poly' sacking to prevent soil getting in among the rubble & flints when the mound is capped with soil and turfs.

The irregular shape of the rubble & flints creates a lot of nooks and crannies into which amphibians can creep and safely spend the winter protected from the weather and other animals.

The original design recommendations incorporated a railway sleeper, but if this is too large for a garden hibernaculum it could be replaced by a medium to large log. The sleeper (or log, the underside of which should be trimmed flat) should be supported on several bricks or flints so that there is a 2-3 cm gap beneath it. Wood is an excellent insulator, so this thick chunk should prevent the frost penetrating down to where the amphibians will be hibernating. To finish off the hibernaculum cover with soil and turf. Leave a few gaps in the turf covering at the base of the mound to give the animals access, or a short piece of plastic drain-pipe could be used to create a tunnel to the gap under the sleeper or log.

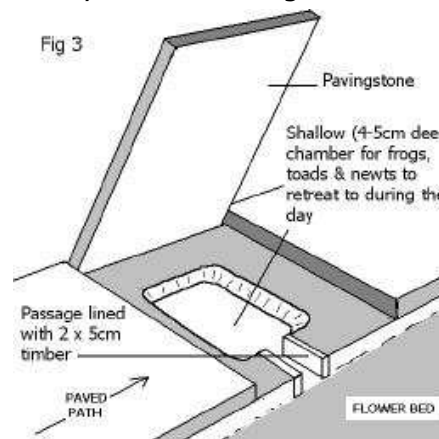
In an hibernaculum constructed by Wycombe Wildlife Group, a half railway sleeper formed one side of the mound so there was direct access to the space beneath it and, therefore, other hide-holes deeper in - see Fig. 1.

The wood and leaf litter mixed in with the rubble & flints will hold water and, along with the covering of turf, help to maintain a humid atmosphere inside the mound reducing the risk that any moist-skinned amphibians present will dry up and die. If possible, construct the hibernaculum close to your pond so that overflow from the pond will help keep it damp.



If the soil at your site is free draining, water will not accumulate in the bottom of the hibernaculum. However, if your garden or school wildlife area is not free draining, water will collect in the pit and might cover the hibernating amphibians and drown them as, with little air getting to it and the presence of rotting leaves, there would be very little oxygen, if any, present in the water. In this case, pile the rubble & flints up into a mound by the pond and then cover with soil and, perhaps, turn it into a rockery. "Mini-caves" could be created under the rockery by supporting paving slabs on bricks and piling the earth dug out from the pond on top of them. Entrance to the "mini-caves" can be provided by short lengths of plastic drainpipe leading from them to gaps between the rocks on the rockery.

An hibernaculum, of course, also creates a hiding place for many insects, and other "mini-beasts" all year round. In addition to "winter quarters", amphibians require cool, moist, shady places to rest during the heat of the day in the summer. A wood pile in a shady corner of the garden or wildlife area will make ideal "summer quarters" - see the Wycombe Wildlife Group "Gardens for Deadwood" leaflet.



If you have a paved path or fairly large, flat stepping stones across a grassed area you can create another simple, safe hide-away beneath them—see figure 3. Lift a paving stone and excavate a chamber, 3-4cm deep, from the compacted soil beneath it.

Support the sides of the chamber with wood if necessary and cut a passage from the chamber to the side of the path and support the sides of this passage as well with wood.

By all means occasionally lift the stone to see if the summer retreat is being used, but do take care when lowering the stone to make sure that none of your "guests" get squashed.