

PLANTS AND PENS

INFORMATION LEAFLET

Duck enclosures need not be muddy, bare, unattractive areas of your garden. With careful planning and a little foresight, pens can be made attractive to the eye and thus enhance the beauty of the residents.

STOCKING

Remember, it is easier to create and landscape an enclosure for wildfowl and bantam ducks than it is for heavy domestic ducks and geese. The main priority when keeping heavy domestic ducks and geese must be to maintain sufficient grass throughout the year as it is virtually impossible to landscape successfully with plants alone. In a moderate sized pen with either a small or natural pond or perhaps two or three man-made ponds, pea-gravel spread around the perimeter of the water forms an attractive feature and will prevent mud from around the area becoming a problem. Sufficient grass in any enclosure is essential if the pen is to remain attractive throughout the year. As a general rule, if the grass should not require cutting in the summer, then you are perhaps over stocked with birds. One cannot over emphasise the problems that overcrowding can cause. Experience and time will teach you how to maintain the balance between ducks and plants.

PLANTING

Assuming that the ponds and the area of the enclosure together with the ducks are reasonably balanced, then it is perfectly feasible to plant successfully for the enjoyment of all. Ideally the enclosure should be planted and established before birds are introduced. Should you have to plant after the arrival of your birds, then your plants and flowers must be protected, until they are fully established. Half-inch wire netting, eighteen inches high, placed around each plant will provide this protection and prevent the plants being destroyed by the inmates. The construction and layout of the pen should be attractive but practical. One should plant with the intention of providing adequate cover for nesting birds, plus shade in the summer and protection in the winter.

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PLANT VARIETIES

The following plants will give you some ideas for your pens.

Sedge grass, planted in clumps of three, provides an excellent habitat for ducks requiring ground cover and, when established, can be used to conceal nest boxes.

Montbretia, planted in abundance, is a useful plant for nest making and given the chance to flower, is pretty. Most ornamental grasses, including pampas and ferns, will make a superb display given time to establish. Evergreen shrubs supply excellent shade in the summer and protection in the winter. Dwarf varieties, in particular, are slow growing and are not invasive. A few examples of ideal evergreen plants are as follows: Cotoneaster, Eleagnus, Pyracantha, Berberis, Rhododendron and Pieris 'Forest Flame'. You could also plant small ground cover plants such as Periwinkle, Potentilla, Rock Rose and Heathers.

The rather larger Hostas are always an attractive addition to any water garden, but of course are not evergreen. These are just a few basic ideas to plan around.



Caution: you should remember that there are plants that can be harmful to your birds. For example the berries on Daphne can be poisonous so this plant, although pretty, should be avoided. If in any doubt about any plant being harmful to your birds it is always best to ask advice at your local garden centre.

Waterfowl are naturally inquisitive and may uproot and nibble any plants in and around the pond. Equally it is not advisable to keep fish in your duck pond as it is difficult to maintain adequate water quality. A well-planned duck enclosure brought alive by waterfowl roaming freely, is a joy to the eye.

FENCING

Waterfowl not only need to be contained but also have to be protected from predators. A fox-proof fence needs to be at least six foot high with an eighteen inch overhang at the top. The bottom of the fence needs to have an extra one foot embedded in the grass. A cost efficient method is to use one inch mesh for the lower half of the fence and two inch for the upper half.

The addition of an electric wire, either mains or battery powered, placed a foot from the ground, will prevent foxes from trying to gain entry. Although it can be considered expensive, the erection of a well constructed fox-proof fence affords great peace of mind knowing that the birds are safe from harm. See the BWA information leaflet "Starting To Keep Wildfowl".

O T H E R I N F O R M A T I O N

This leaflet is only a brief introduction and the successful husbandry of all livestock depends on being well informed about them. The BWA Bookshop sells a number of specialist publications which cover all aspects of keeping both Wildfowl and Domestic Waterfowl. All new keepers are strongly advised to obtain a book appropriate to their interest.

Leaflets in this series available from the BWA Secretary price 25p each.

Starting to keep Wildfowl

Keeping Wildfowl - Geese

Keeping Wildfowl - Perching Ducks

Keeping Wildfowl - Whistling Ducks

Starting to keep Domestic Ducks

Starting to keep Domestic Geese

Breeds of Domestic Duck

Starting to Show Domestic Waterfowl

Pond Construction

Ailments and Remedies

Plants for Ponds and Pens

Incubation of Waterfowl Eggs

Illustrations by Joe Blossom

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