

INTO *the* WILD

Say goodbye to chlorine – the only kind of swimming pool to have today is a natural one that offers pure, clear water and an abundance of plants

What are natural swimming pools? Originating in Austria, self-cleaning natural swimming pools use plants as a living filtration system – much like a pond. The plants filter out contaminants from the water, keeping it crystal clear and free from algae. You'll feel almost as if you were swimming in the wild!

How do they work? The pool is split equally into a regeneration zone (with oxygenating plants in a deep gravel bed) and a swimming area (plant-free open water). A pump is used to circulate clean water back into the swimming area after it has been drawn through perforated pipes beneath the gravel. A submerged wall divides the two zones to stop swimmers' legs from becoming tangled in weed, and the floor is lined to make it feel like a normal pool underfoot.

How do you look after them? The aim is to keep the water biologically balanced and devoid of nutrients; so do not add fish, and

discourage ducks from swimming in it (a starter pistol fired in the air, or a dog, helps with this!). It's also important to scoop out any leaves and cut back reeds in autumn using a skimmer, a creature-friendly device that floats on the open water and collects debris.

What are the benefits? Unlike conventional pools, there's no need for chlorine, so water is soft on the skin. The planted area is a sanctuary for wildlife such as water beetles, newts and dragonflies. Plus, the shallower water in the planted regeneration zone warms quickly and feeds in to the swimming area, so you can use it for most of the year. These pools are low maintenance because they never need to be drained and, in winter, can be left to ice over.

How much do they cost? It varies depending on the size of the pool and the features selected (you can add on a floating deck, jetty or stepping stones), but roughly £50,000 or more. ►

This page Extending a sundeck over the water keeps pool users close to nature even during periods of relaxation. Plentiful greenery – including ferns, which help shelter the pool, and climbing plants on the wall of the house – creates a verdant setting



Easy living An entertaining area that can be reached from both the interior and the exterior of the pool is ideal for a relaxed, al fresco existence. German architectural practice Fuchs Wacker (fuchswacker.de), which designed this Berlin-based site, used a natural pool by Biotop (biotop-natural-pool.com) to create the feel of an outdoor spa. The floating dining terrace, made from Italian limestone, lends a real outdoor/indoor look to the whole setting.



Step by step This natural pool in Somerset by Clear Water Revival (clear-water-revival.com) features stepping stones that section off the planted area from the swimming zone and double as diving platforms. Garden designer Amanda Patton (amandapatton.co.uk) chose a tactile hardwood deck with sawn York stone edgings and put tall plants behind the seating area to cast beautiful reflections in the water.



PICTURES: MIQUEL TRES TEASY LIVING; JERRY HANPUK (STEP BY STEP)

Wildlife sanctuary Designed by Chris Carr Associates (01266 286256), an oak-and-slate pavilion provides the perfect haven from which to watch wildlife following a swim in this natural pool in Suffolk. A green oak jetty, pebble edging and clusters of tall reeds – all part of the vision of The Swimming Pond Company (theswimmingpondcompany.com) – blend the pool with its surroundings and enhance the tranquil feel of the scene.



Natural beauty A normal pool can be transformed into a self-cleaning one by incorporating a planted area – the so-called regeneration zone – either within the existing structure of the pool or by extending the water surface. Natural Pools UK (naturalpoolsuk.com) uses technology by Austrian brand Biotop (biotop-natural-pool.com) to carry out conversion projects of this kind, as well as to create dream pools from scratch. ►



WHERE TO BUY IN THE UK

Anglo Swimming Ponds

(020 8363 8548; angloswimmingponds.co.uk)

Clear Water Revival

(0117 923 2588; clear-water-revival.com)

Gartenart Swimming Ponds

(020 7183 3333; gartenart.co.uk)

Natural Pools UK

(01909 485621; naturalpoolsuk.com)

The Swimming Pond Company

(01379 688000; theswimmingpondcompany.com)

Woodhouse Natural Pools

(01223 290029; naturalswimmingpools.com)

This page Nature flows without interruption at this home in Hertfordshire. A serene, softly shaped natural pool by Gartenart Swimming Ponds (gartenart.co.uk) is surrounded by a wealth of plants and grasses, while a simple wooden jetty, ideal for dangling toes in the water, adds a linear touch **ED**