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Derbyshire Wildlife Trust is a registered charity with more than 10,000 members supporting its work to protect the county's wildlife.

To find out how to join, visit our website or phone 01773 881188.

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Further Information

Beebee (1985). *Frogs and Toads*. Whittet Books, London.

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All our native amphibians need shallow water for their breeding sites. As ponds and marshes are lost and become degraded in the wider countryside, so garden ponds are becoming an increasingly important breeding and feeding habitat for all but the rarest of our amphibians.

While all three species of newts will breed in garden ponds, the most obvious species are the frogs and toads, which form large, noisy gatherings in ponds in the spring to spawn.

frogs and toads in gardens



Photograph by Darin Smith

frogs and toads in gardens

Common Frog (Rana temporaria)

The common frog is our commonest amphibian, and the one that relies most heavily on garden ponds.

Frogs' skin is moist and smooth and very variable in colour, although they are usually yellow-brown with a darker brown patch behind each eye. Frogs have long back legs and move around on land by jumping. They feed at night, mainly on slugs, snails and insects.

Frogs enter the water during February or March and lay large clumps of spawn. The tadpoles hatch two weeks later and by midsummer they will have developed into froglets. They emerge from the pond in the early autumn and move away to spend most of their adult lives on land, in marshes, wet grassland and woodland.

During the winter, some adult frogs hibernate in mud on the bottom of the pond, but most hibernate nearby, under piles of logs, in dry stone walls or amongst tree roots.

Common Toad (Bufo bufo)

The common toad is roughly the same size as the frog, but has drier, warty, greyish skin and moves on land by crawling, having shorter back legs.

Toads eat earthworms, ants, beetles and other insects.

Toads breed in larger, deeper ponds than frogs, usually travelling to the same pond in which they were born. Toads arrive in the ponds to breed a month or two later than frogs, and lay their spawn in long strings, wrapped around water plants.

Like the frog, toads leave the water soon after breeding and move into woodland and tussocky grassland. They spend the winter hibernating in damp, sheltered cavities, often using garden rockeries.

Too much frog spawn?

Small ponds may appear to be overflowing with spawn in the spring. As many predators eat spawn, tadpoles and froglets, there is no reason to worry: you will not be over run by frogs! Such large quantities of spawn and tadpoles are an important part of the food chain, so it is always best to let natural processes regulate numbers.

Should I move frog spawn?

NEVER move spawn to another pond, lake or stream, either in neighbours gardens or in the wider countryside.

Movement of spawn may spread ***frog diseases***, most notably the 'Red Leg' virus which was introduced into this country with imported goldfish and to which the small isolated frog populations found in urban areas seem to be particularly susceptible. These diseases are fatal to frogs and can wipe out entire populations very quickly.

There are also a number of ***invasive plant*** species that are frequently found in garden ponds and that, if introduced to a new site, quickly take over a pond and rapidly choke out the native wildlife. Several of these plants, most notably New Zealand swamp stonecrop (*Crassula helmsii*) and water fern (*Azolla filiculoides*) will grow from a tiny fragment of a parent plant and can easily be moved around with frog spawn.

What can I do to help frogs and toads?

The best way to help amphibians is to dig a garden pond and manage it for wildlife. Only plant native plant species in it and avoid introducing fish or ducks, both of which predate frogs and toads.

Elsewhere in the garden,

- ⇒ Create log piles or rockeries for frogs and toads to hibernate in.
- ⇒ Leave areas of long tussocky grass between the pond and hedgerows and walls to give amphibians a way out of the pond.
- ⇒ Don't use slug poison as this will kill the frogs that feed on the slugs and snails.

