For some plants, consistently wet or even submerged soil is a requirement for success. Pond or stream margins offer this in nature, but with planning even a modest garden pond can incorporate a bog garden with luxuriant planting.

**Pick of the plants**

Plants that grow successfully with roots in water or wet, muddy soil are essentially pond plants, their roots adapted to being submerged. Different marginals grow in a range of water depths; some for pond edges tolerate a maximum of 5cm (2in) of water above their crowns, but others also thrive at lower depths.

A pond edge is where water meets land, an environment found in nature where rivers or streams flood, or by a pond that naturally fills and dries out with the seasons. These areas may be under water at some times of the year, wet mud at others, and they are often the habitat of many beautiful and garden-worthy plants.

By contrast, many garden pools and water features – kept within a flexible membrane or cast fibreglass liner, the outside edge set into paving or turf – are quite self-contained. Gardeners may plant shallow-water, pond-edge plants to help soften the effect and blend a pond into the garden, yet pond edges can be inspiring features in their own right. They make wonderful habitats for wildlife, and if you can create a continually wet, bog garden area beside the pond, you can enjoy lush planting both in the water and at soil edges, with a range of choice pond-edge and marginal plants.

**Anemopsis californica**

This plant needs wet mud, its crown at or near water level. At 90cm (3ft) tall native *Lythrum salicaria* (loosestrife) has many small, vivid pink flowers on sturdy erect stems. Plants with upright stems. Plants with upright stems. Plants with upright stems. Plants with upright stems. Plants with upright stems.
Pond-edge plants
growths such as this add a means of escape for damsel and dragonfly larvae to emerge and become adults.

Upright growth is complemented by the rafting growth of several native plants. *Mentha aquatica* (water mint) has aromatic foliage and, in summer, lilac, globular heads of flowers, while *Veronica beccabunga* (brooklime) produces fleshy growth, shining foliage and masses of tiny, dark blue flowers. With pretty five-lobed leaves, *Potentilla palustris* (marsh cinquefoil) has maroon, star-shaped summer flowers. Non-native *Gunnera magellanica* is a plant for muddy pond edges, a tiny version of better-known giant *G. manicata*, with leaves just 2cm (1in) wide and minute flowers, then orange seeds on a spike.

These all scramble horizontally across wet soil or the water surface, linking and blending the two areas. They also form habitat opportunities for amphibians as they exit ponds into the boggy emergence zone.

As summer progresses
After midsummer the elegantly drooping, fragrant yellow or orange flowerheads of *Primula florindae* and *Mentha cervina* add colour and fragrance.

Foliage and seedheads are just as important – *Carex riparia* early in the season has 5cm (2in) black seedheads, while later *Juncus ensifolius* has 5mm (⅜in) dense, round, black seedheads. Evergreen *Cyperus eragrostis* has stems topped by radiating leaves, like the spokes of a parasol, and interesting seedheads summer to autumn. For a large pool, *Typha latifolia* has bulrush-like heads that last through winter. Many pond-edge plants are UK natives – few are new introductions, but *Primula florindae* was grown as a moisture-loving perennial before it was found to survive in shallow water.

Boxed numbers in the text refer to the following pond-edge plants

1 *Veronica beccabunga*
2 *Iris pseudacorus*
3 *Primula florindae*
4 *Typha latifolia*
5 *Mentha aquatica*
6 *Lythrum salicaria*
7 *Cyperus eragrostis*
8 *Juncus ensifolius*
9 *Potentilla palustris*
10 *Anemopsis californica*
11 *Gunnera magellanica*

Photographed 29 July 2015 at Waterside Nursery, Leicestershire.

In deeper water
Other plants accept far deeper water above their crowns; used with pond-edge plants the poolside display can be impressive. With 12–33cm (5–13in) of water above its crown, blue (or white)-flowered *Pontederia cordata*...
(pickerel weed), or lovely native *Butomus umbellatus* (flowering rush) with pink flowers atop 90cm (3ft) stems are superb in summer. Exotic *Thalia dealbata* has bold foliage and wiry stems of purple flowers to 1.8m (6ft); planted below water it survives most winters. For slightly deeper water, to 40cm (16in), try *Oroontium aquaticum* (golden club) with curious yellow flower spikes and lance-shaped leaves.

**Plant diversity**

For a community of plants to thrive, it is important to include different planting depths in and around a pond, maximising diversity.

All ponds should be constructed with shelves or platforms to allow for planting in all depths of water. Make each shelf wide enough to place more than one basket of pond plants to form a larger companion planting group. A narrow rim around a pond will be difficult to plant in a natural-looking arrangement.

For baskets of pond-edge plants, shallow planting shelves about 11-14cm /4-5in deep are ideal. Such plants are able to survive frost and ice, and help make a pleasing transition between the shallow pond shelf, the sloping cobbled area of a pond beach and the wet bog garden area beyond.

Deeper shelves (at 14-22cm/6-9in, or even up to 44cm/17in) are ideally positioned at the back of the pond, and many of the plants suitable for these deeper areas tend to also be taller. These plants grow in this deeper water to protect their crowns from surface frost and ice. As well as those mentioned, try native *Alisma plantago-aquatica* and *Cyperus longus*, while *Iris pseudacorus* will grow well in a range of depths.

**Bog gardens**

A wet bog garden can be dug separately to the pond, and even added to an existing water area to create a new planting environment and habitat zone. Dig a straight-sided hole, maximum 60cm (2ft) deep, and line with a water-retentive membrane, but pierce a few holes with a fork to allow some water to drain out. Add a 7cm (3in) layer of gravel to the base and fill with topsoil mixed with an aquatic soil, which should allow the soil to stay permanently wet. Do not use multipurpose compost. Some ideal plants for bog gardens include *Hesperantha coccinea*, *Eriophorum angustifolium* and *Carex pseudocyperus*.

More from the RHS  
For more information including a list of plants for a wider range of different water depths, search ‘Pond plants’ at [www.rhs.org.uk](http://www.rhs.org.uk)