

"READ ALL ABOUT IT, READ ALL....." The Sod Jobber

AND SO WE DID.

Books, magazines, articles, all bit the dust. Before long we were experts on the humble garden pond; how to dig it, where to dig it, how to line it, how to stock it, how to keep your water sweet - everything necessary for the aquatic fanatic. Reading complete, it was time for action.

First problem: in a garden dominated by trees, where do you put your pond? The mid-lawn variety surrounded by tiled splendour, plastic chairs and unlikely gnomes was quickly discarded. So it had to go in a flower bed behind the garage. First decision over, work could begin.

The management stood there in her rainbow wellies directing this woebegone, mis-shapen and seriously under-muscled male of the species. I didn't dare complain or my ration of jam doughnuts would be reduced. Various plants were hauled protesting to other sites. The bare patch, thus despoiled, awaited a serious attack of pillaging.

Pickaxe flailing and almost under control, the master craftsman warmed to his task.

To start with it was barrow loads of soil being taken towards the compost heap, but before long great wedges of clay were finding their way to a sweaty burial under the conifer hedge. A well marked rut across the lawn marked the line of the cortege. My back throbbed with those weighty hunks. Even after the going down of the sun, I was remembering them.

Bedtime arrived early.

Several sessions later the digging

was finished. The hole was its statutory eighteen inches deep in the centre, with a shelf sculpted for plants. By the time she'd finished, the boss had smoothed the hole to the suavity of a double glazing salesman. A layer of sand was followed by one of newspaper. Were we making a submarine time capsule to be excavated in centuries to come?

In went the liner, snipped to shape and the whole was surrounded by weathered slabs of limestone retrieved from a collapsed Cotswold wall. Even the neighbours, between bouts of encouragement and mockery, looked impressed. Dusk arrived to find a newly filled pond reflecting the evening sky. Everything was finished.

Well, not quite. As we looked out of the window first thing next morning we were just a little surprised to see that the missing ingredient had flown in.

There, floating on the surface, bobbed a bright yellow plastic duck, beloved of bath-tubs nationwide. The neighbours had christened our pond. Not to be outdone we fished it out and tied it securely to the top of the fence, between our pond and theirs. Tied to its beak we put a large yellow balloon proclaiming in best felt tip: "I couldn't make up my mind" (sitting on the fence between two ponds - geddit?)

Looking out today we see a pond sprouting with water hawthorn, marsh marigold and irises, a pond beautifully ringed with day lilies, yellow rocket and handsome peony. Our faces, in turn, are ringed with satisfaction and pleasure.