



LITTLE RES Q

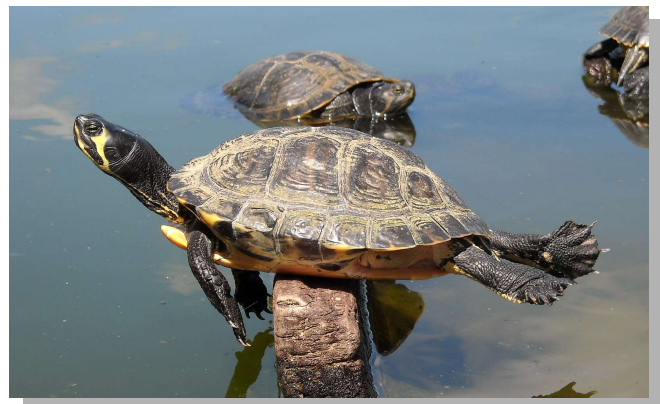
Welcome to Little RES Q's Easy Guide to Outdoor Ponds for Red Eared Slider Turtles!

The Little RES Q is Ontario's first CRA registered charity reptile rescue specializing in one of the world's most misunderstood animals, the Red Eared Slider.

For more information about Little RES Q, please visit our website: www.littleresq.net or check us out on social media @littleresq

What you can find in this guide:

- Climate Considerations
- Safety and Security
- What does a turtle pond need?
- What about fish?
- Hibernating turtles in outdoor ponds
- Resources

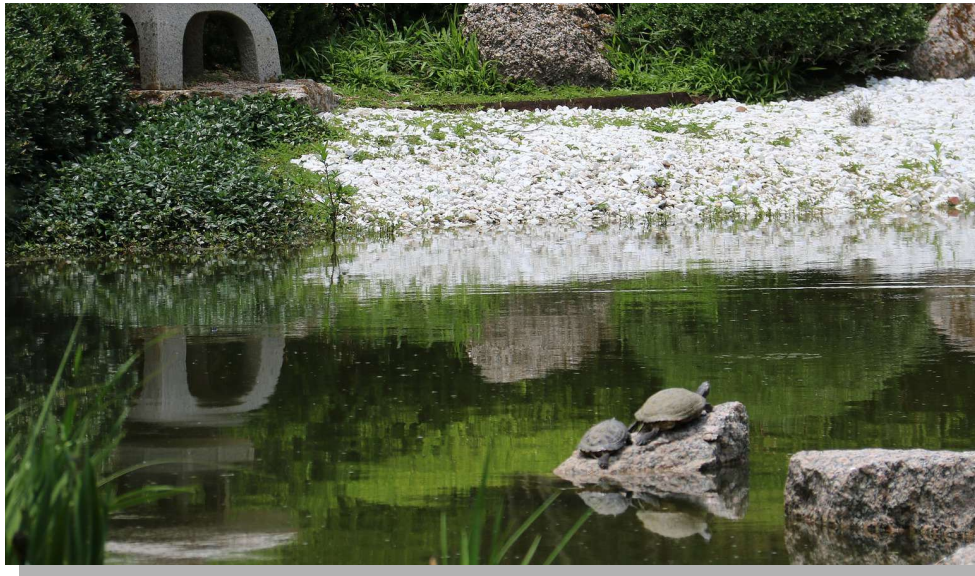


This guide is designed to help you build a safe outdoor habitat for your pet turtle(s). Before beginning construction, be sure to have all the necessary permits. It is your responsibility to ensure that all necessary approvals have been obtained.

Climate Considerations

Depending on where you live, putting an aquatic turtle outdoors might be something you can only do for a few months during the summer.

Red-eared sliders are quite hardy and adaptable. However, some other species need warmer temperatures. Keep the natural habits of your turtle in mind when deciding if you should house them outdoors.



Safety and Security

Pet aquatic turtles kept in outdoor ponds need to have secure fencing. When constructing your fencing, make sure to follow these guidelines:

- **Fence Height:** 2-3x higher than the carapace length of your turtle
- **Fence Depth below the ground:** 6-10 inches for most turtle species
- **Fence Lid/Cover:** Many turtles can climb vertically, consider placing a cover or a lip around the top of the fence to prevent turtles from escaping your pond

A fence is essential in preventing the release of your turtles in to the surrounding environment and losing your beloved pet. Red Eared Sliders love to patrol and many will wander in search of a mate if left to their own devices. The fence should have a solid base so turtles don't get caught up in the wire.

Having a protective fencing around your pond will help to protect your turtles from being attacked by wildlife. Rural and urban predators will target a turtle in a pond if it is improperly set-up.

Red-eared Sliders have been known to climb and dig with fervor. A turtle on a mission for a mate can easily climb a basic fence. You may want to consider a cover (e.g. chicken wire) or a wooden lip over the pond area to protect your turtles.

Hatchlings and small turtles are extremely vulnerable to predators so are best kept indoors until they are a good size.



What Does a Turtle Pond Need?

The depth of a turtle pond will vary depending on the species but the body of water should have a relatively large surface area (which provides better oxygen levels in the water). Red-eared sliders and some other turtles can handle a deeper pond, while some turtles prefer to be in shallower water, so again consider the natural habits of the turtle species when planning your pond.

Try to have varied levels of water with slopes between them. A shallow area where the turtle can sit in the water with its head out is desirable as well.

You can use a preformed pond liner or a flexible pond liner (get the heaviest one, as turtles have fairly sharp claws).

Make sure to cover all of these areas when building your turtle pond:

- **Basking area:** You **must** provide a log, plank, bricks, or rock for the turtle to get out of the water and bask in the sun. Arrange your basking area so it is partially submerged so your turtle can easily get out of the water onto the basking area.

The basking area should get sunlight for a good portion of the afternoon.

- **Land area:** Turtles do like to get out for a stroll, so include some land around the pond in your fenced area.
- **Hiding areas:** Provide hiding spots and shaded areas both in the water and out of the water. Large leafed plants (aquatic or on land) work well, as do clay plant pots placed on their sides.
- **Plants:** Water plants provide shade and shelter as well as extra food so they are a great addition to turtle ponds. Water lettuce, water hyacinth, fairy moss, fish weed, Cabomba, and tape grass are recommended. Marginal plants like dwarf cattails, dwarf rushes, and dwarf papyrus also help naturalize the pond edge.
- **Oxygenation:** The levels of oxygen in the water can be improved by the addition of waterfalls, fountains, external filters and airstones. This is especially important in cold weather.

What About Fish?

One great advantage to larger ponds is that you can add feeder guppies and goldfish and your turtle can keep busy hunting.

However, if you prefer ornamental fish like Koi, **caution is warranted.**

Some turtles are quite avid hunters and may even try to nibble on larger fish which can cause injuries to them (especially fins and tails).

Water quality can be harder to control with turtles in the pond, which can affect the fish.



Hibernating Turtles in Outdoor Ponds

Many North American aquatic turtles from temperate climates (including red-eared sliders) hibernate during cooler months.

Aquatic turtles usually hibernate at temperatures lower than 10°C. Some experts believe that hibernating aquatic turtles outdoors is too risky since natural conditions are hard to replicate in a backyard pond. They recommend bringing all aquatic turtles indoors during the winter.

If you decide to try hibernating aquatic turtles, there are several important things to consider:

- **Pond Size:** To successfully overwinter turtles, a deep pond with a large surface area is necessary. A hibernating turtle needs at least a foot of water that isn't frozen at the bottom of the pond. Aquatic turtles usually settle into the sediment at the bottom of a pond to hibernate and switch to absorbing oxygen through the skin, so the levels of oxygen in the water must be kept high enough.
- **Oxygenation:** Some method of adding supplemental oxygen is a good idea. Running a pump (to keep water moving) or air pump can increase oxygen levels in the water.
- **Water De-icers and Heaters:** Pond supply companies usually sell submersible heaters which can be used in the pond during winter. De-icers will usually prevent the pond from totally freezing over, which can help with oxygenation as well as make the pond safer. A water temperature of around about 10C seems to be the best for hibernation. Avoid heaters that raise the temperature much above this as a cold and inactive turtle that is not at a low enough temperature to hibernate is likely to be severely stressed.
- **Someplace to Dig:** Aquatic turtles in the wild usually submerge themselves in sediment at the bottom of a body of water for hibernation. Make sure there is something on the bottom of the pond such as a layer of leaves to give the turtle something to dig into for hibernation. Some people even put a pan of sand or sand and soil mixed at the bottom for hibernation. Too much decaying plant matter can negatively impact water quality though, so be careful about having too much.
- **Prepare the Turtle:** Only healthy, strong turtles should be hibernated. Turtles should also have been in the pond since at least mid-summer to have time to adjust to the changing season to prepare for hibernation, and they should be older than six months. As the weather cools, the turtle will eat less and less which is normal. As the turtle stops eating and the temperatures approach 10C, stop feeding.

Resources:

LandOwner Resource Centre. Building a Pond PDF. Ministry of Natural Resources of Ontario. http://www.lronline.com/Extension_Notes_English/pdf/pnds.pdf

Darla Grant-Braid. (May 2016). Building a backyard pond (Part 1 of 3). TorontoSun.com. <https://torontosun.com/2016/05/19/eieihomecom-building-a-backyard-pond-part-1-of-3/wcm/17d585ee-cbb8-4f70-b31c-646ac98fbbc4>

Joe Genovese. (2017). Benefits of a backyard pond. Genoscape.ca;
<https://genoscape.ca/category/genoscape-info/toronto-pond-construction/>

LOWE's. How to build a backyard pond. Lowes.ca. <https://www.lowes.ca/ideas-how-to/diy/how-to-build-a-backyard-pond>

Sandy Garland. (March 2018). Build a Backyard Pond for Wildlife. Fletcher Wildlife Garden. <https://ofnc.ca/programs/fletcher-wildlife-garden/make-your-own-wildlife-garden/build-a-backyard-pond-for-wildlife>

Government of Ontario. (2020) Permits to Take Water; The Government of Ontario;
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/permits-take-water>

John Sankey. (1988) Make a Pond for Wildlife; John Sankey;
<http://web.ncf.ca/bf250/pond.html>

Please Note: The volunteers of Little RES Q are available upon request for one-on-one video or phone consultations for all your outdoor pond needs. Please be aware that our consultations are a service provided by our volunteers. All services may come with a recommended donation amount to help keep our shelter running. We hold the right to waive and withdraw service fees depending on the circumstances surrounding the service request. Thank you for your understanding.