

WATER BOWLS FOR WILDLIFE

Why have a Water Bowl?

Water is a great way to attract wildlife to a garden. All animals need water to drink. Birds also need water to bathe in. Our birds, lizards, insects and possums can benefit from additional water sources, particularly during the Summer.

A water bowl provides the opportunity for us to observe wildlife more easily, which is entertaining, relaxing and educational. It's also good to know we are helping our wild neighbours to thrive.

Many different receptacles or containers can be used as water bowls provided they have the characteristics identified below or can be modified to suit. It can be as simple as buying a terracotta pot saucer or even a plastic pot saucer.

What design?

The best water bowls, are those that have a shallow profile so that most birds and animals can stand in them without being out of their depth. A depth of 2.5-5.0 cm is preferable. The container should slope gently down to this depth to assist small animals or animals with short legs to get in and out. A rock can be added to reduce the depth, or a stick to create a ramp.

The bowl should be watertight. A sealed terracotta pot saucer is a good example. The seal can be a glaze or waterproof sealer provided it has a rough or matte surface to help animals grip the bottom rather than a slippery smooth surface.

For birds, the bowl should have an edge that can be gripped by birds' feet, i.e. not a sharp, thin edge, or a flat, wide edge but a slightly rounded edge.

The interior should be easily cleanable, i.e. not too many nooks and crannies.

If cats and dogs are likely to be frequently present, a water bowl should also be able to be placed over 1 metre above the ground, attached to, or hung on, a tree or other structure, such as a pedestal. The bowl should be stable and not tip over or wobble when an animal uses it.

In areas not frequented by cats and dogs and where ground dwelling animals need access to water, a water bowl can be placed on the ground, or partly buried, with its lip not more than 1 cm above the ground so that small and short animals like lizards can reach, or climb into it.

Where to locate a water bowl?

Make sure you locate a water bowl where you can see it easily so that you can enjoy your visitors and see how the water bowl is performing. Outside a kitchen or living room window is great.

The water bowl's location is also important for an animal's actual and perceived safety. Predators come in the form of larger animals such as, cats, Kookaburras or Butcher Birds. Many water bowl visitors like to move only short distances in the open and need to have a refuge nearby, out of predators' sight and reach.

For lizards, low plants, leaf litter, logs and rocks near the water bowl can provide this refuge. For birds, the branches of an overhanging tree or a dense shrub or creeper should be located within 1 to 2 metres of the water bowl.

It is recommended that the water bowl have a degree of clearance around it, so that predators can't hide within pouncing distance. Cats like to lie in wait beneath a shrub, or other cover before pouncing.

Locating your water bowl near a tap or within reach of a hose makes cleaning it easier.

Having more than one water bowl at various heights and locations around your garden can provide a range of options for your wildlife to choose from and reduce competition for one bowl.

How to Maintain a Water Bowl

Birds use water bowls to both drink and bathe in. Birds often leave dust, mites and droppings behind. A dirty bowl could pass on disease from one animal to another and the water could become unhealthy to drink.

Ideally, the water in the bowl should be replaced daily, especially in Summer. Replacing the water every 3 to 4 days also prevents mosquito larvae from growing. The sides and bottom of the bowl should also be scrubbed every 2 to 4 weeks to remove any nasty build up.

Once you have installed your water bowl, be patient if animals don't use it within the first few weeks. Keep the water fresh because sometimes it can take months for animals to identify it and assess its suitability. But after they start visiting, they often become frequent, regular visitors.

Further Info:

<https://www.bayfonw.org.au/g4ws/waterbowls>

