

Ponds are fascinating busy habitats – and important for local wildlife. Children may already be familiar with some of the creatures on these rollers and will enjoy learning more about any they don't recognise. Using the rollers to create detailed and tactile pond patterns and pictures will help develop fine motor skills that are vital for early mark making and writing.

Ripple effect

Children will enjoy trying out the rollers independently, but guiding them through the early stages will help them get to grips with them:

- The easiest way to use a roller is to roll it away from you – creating a long scene or pattern in the dough. Afterwards, if the design is facing sideways, simply turn the piece of dough round so the scene faces the child. They can then use the stamp at the end of the roller to complete the picture.
- The next step is learning to roll across the body. As well as encouraging children to apply equal pressure laterally, this action will challenge them to cross the midline and develop motor skills important for learning to write.



- Talk about how hard the child has to press down with the roller to make the design come out well. What happens to the picture when they press harder or more gently?
- What does the picture feel like when they run their finger over it?
- Explore using the rollers with different substrates, such as clay, kinetic sand, sand dough or cloud dough. This will encourage children to adapt their rolling technique, pressing harder when necessary and developing their motor skills.
- Provide the rollers and dough on a suitable surface for children to explore independently.

Precious pond life

As children use the rollers, take the opportunity to talk about the different animals that live in, on or around ponds:

- Do the children recognise any of the animals? Have they ever seen any in or near a real pond or river? Which live in the water, and which live nearby?
- What do the children notice about the shape of each animal? How many legs do they have? Do they have wings?

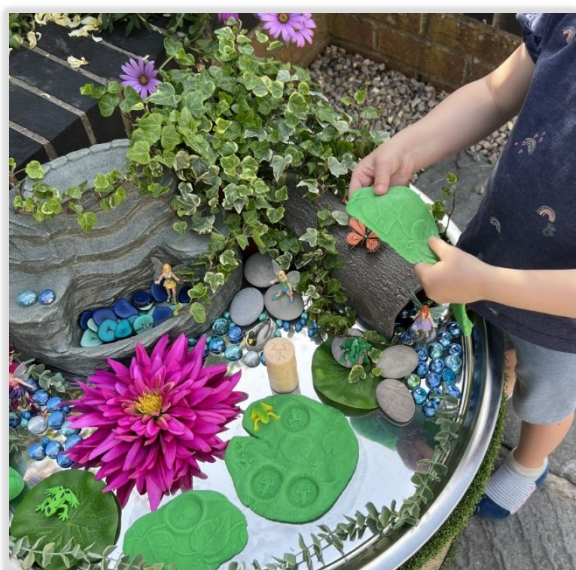
- Do any of them swim? Which parts of their bodies do they use to move through the water? Have any of the children ever seen a pond skater moving across water? What would happen if we tried to walk on top of the water?
- What do the animals eat? Do they eat plants, other animals or a combination? Are there any other animals that like to eat them?
- All these animals lay eggs – which one might lay the biggest eggs, or the smallest?
- Can the children match the rolled designs to pictures or figures of these animals?
- When the children have stamped the animal shapes onto their design, encourage them to count the number of animals – such as how many dragonflies are flying among the bulrushes.
- Encourage children to make up simple stories about the animals they roll – what are their names, where do they live and what are they doing? Are they hiding from anything? Are they looking for food?
- Have the children ever visited a real pond? Did they see any of these animals? What other animals did they see? You might like to take the opportunity to talk about water safety and why we shouldn't go into a pond.



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Explore more

- Children can build on their rolled designs and create a sensory picture by adding natural materials and other water-themed items, such as leaves, flowers, attractive pebbles, glass beads or pieces of blue fabric. They might like to combine designs from several rollers to make a larger pond picture. You could use these designs as inspiration for other pond-themed art, such as paintings, printing or collages made from cut-out paper shapes.
- Use the rollers and dough as part of a pond explorers table, alongside animal figures, notebooks, magnifying glasses, images of pond animals, books and natural materials.



- Create a small-world pond with plenty of storytelling potential. The pond could be a large mirror, blue fabric or real water, with props such as pebbles, flowers, plants, logs, lily pads (cut out of green paper or fabric) and animal figures.
- Visit a real pond and look out for interesting animals, or even some frogspawn. You may even be able to work together to install a small pond in your setting (with appropriate safeguards to keep children from entering the water).



- Kingfishers are fascinating, with their bright colours and fast movements. You may be lucky enough to spot one – or watch an online video to allow children to learn more about them.
- Make your own pond skaters by twisting together three pieces of thin wire and curling the 'legs' so they all touch the ground (videos are available online showing how to do this). Children will love seeing their own pond skaters standing on water and begin to see the effect of surface tension.



Get talking – useful words

Float, swim, dive, skate, surface, underwater, edge, bank, lily pad, weeds, bulrushes.

Books about pond life

Just Ducks! by Nicola Davies

Over and Under the Pond by Kate Messner

Peep Inside the Pond by Anna Milbourne

Freddy the Frog by Axel Scheffler

Songs about pond animals

Five Little Speckled Frogs

Five Little Ducks

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, Once I Caught a Fish Alive