

Nightingale Community Garden
Clearing out the sump, 8 August 2026
Notes by Rob, edited by Anne

Background

The pond has three main levels:

- Boggy margin (partially under water for some of the year).
- Pond bed (under water for most of the year).
- Sump (the deepest level, intended as a refuge of last resort for pond plants and animals).

The sump is approximately 1 metre wide by 2 metres long. The bottom of the sump is about 40cm below the pond bed

The pond dried out for the first time in the long drought of 2026. Anne invented a scheme for making the sump into a Mini Pond with:

- Open water at the east end.
- Vegetation at the west end.

There were various difficulties:

- In the ten years since the pond was made, the sump had filled up with mud. This is soil washed down from the bank which surrounds the pond.
- All sorts of debris had been thrown into the sump by Boisterous Young Garden Visitors.
- The entire area of the sump was covered with vegetation, much of it spearwort and fringed water lily. There was a thick braid of moss and spearwort roots around the rim of the sump.

Given that the sump had been neglected for ten years, we couldn't expect to do everything at once. The plan for future years is to clear out the sump every August, so as to reduce the amount of mud gradually.

Health and Safety

There is a risk assessment for working in and around the pond. Major points are:

- Involve at least two people. In this case, Anne and Rob did the job.
- Wear appropriate clothing: wellies, clothes which can get dirty.
- Wear gloves if appropriate (eg if skin is sensitive).
- Take care to avoid overbalancing, especially when moving around in the water.

Equipment

- Small spades (choose ones with unsharp edges, so as not to damage the pond liner).
- Big plastic tubs, for putting mud and plant debris in.
- Watering cans for use at the end of the job:
 - Green cans for clean water used to wash equipment and clothing
 - Red cans for trough water used to top up the sump.

Method

NB Take photos before and after, and at intermediate stages as necessary.

- **Stage S1.** Clear out unwanted plants, with their roots. On this occasion we cleared out about 60% of foliage from the sump, leaving a mass of foliage at the west end. Rob took the opportunity to remove unwanted plants between the sump and the pond dipping platform.

Spread the foliage out on the bank to dry for a week, then add to Anne's untidy compost heap.

- **Stage S2.** Clear the braid of moss and spearwort roots from the rim of the sump. Spread this material out on the bank to dry for a week, then add to Anne's untidy compost heap.
- **Stage S3.** Clear out all foreign objects: rocks and bricks, sticks and small branches, miscellaneous objects. Dispose of them as follows:
 - Hide rocks and bricks out of sight in the overflow area.
 - Put sticks and small branches on the hibernaculum or Anne's untidy compost heap.
 - Put miscellaneous objects in the rubbish bins on the perimeter path.

On this occasion we found about twenty rocks and bricks. Miscellaneous objects included a nitrous oxide gas canister and two plastic objects which appeared to be a lighter and vape.

- **Stage S4.** Use the spades to clear mud from the sump. This has to be done carefully so as not to damage the pond liner. Put the mud in plastic tubs (not too much at a time, or the tub will be too heavy to lift). Leave the mud on the bank to dry for a week. It's high in nutrients, so it shouldn't stay in the pond enclosure. Once dry, it can be used elsewhere in the garden, eg on the rhubarb bed.

On this occasion we removed about ten tubs of mud – quite enough for one session! We left a lot of mud in the sump, and this will be removed in future years.

- **Stage S5.** Make notes as necessary.
- **Stage S6.** Top up the sump with water from the trough. Rob used ten watering cans, giving a total of 100 litres of water.

NB One reason for leaving organic matter on the bank for a week is to allow pond animals to find their way back to the water. However it's likely that most pond animals have left the water/mud by August (though they may be sheltering in damp pond foliage).

Notes

- **Gravel.** At the bottom of the sump is a fair amount of gravel, mixed in with the mud. The gravel was intentionally put in when the pond was built. The mud is soil from the bank above the pond, washed down during rainstorms.

The mud/gravel mixture can hide the rocks and foreign objects thrown into the pond, so needs to be explored/examined fairly carefully.
- **Exposed pond liner.** As a result of steps S1 and S2 (above), some of the pond liner was exposed. Horizontal overlap could be seen. This is explained in the notes of the meeting with Guy Belcher on 10 August. The "exposed pond liner" was actually overlapping strips of geothermal textile.
- **Pond liner** seemed in good condition, and roots and weeds were easily pulled away from it.

Some of Rob's photos are on the next page.

In the top two photos Anne acted as a scale marker (she's five feet tall and her wellies are 30cm high). She was standing in the sump.



Before: the sump full of vegetation. In the foreground are the unwanted plants between sump and platform.



After: 60% of the vegetation cleared from the sump.



After: the sump topped up with 100 litres of water from the trough. This photo was taken from the bank. It shows mud, plant debris and sticks spread out to dry.