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Fencing Pools and Ponds

How can the tiny little legs of my toddler move so fast? His feet hardly touch the ground, and he is off, sprinting towards one thing or another. Fortunately, we live out in the country and the nearest road is down a long driveway. However, what scares me the most is we have a big pond on our front lawn surrounded by tall grass and deep mud. It's full of frogs, fish, turtles, and shiny water that acts like a beacon to toddler attention.

Farm ponds can be a serious hazard on the farm, just as pools and fishponds can be a hazard in anyone's back yard. According to the CDC, children ages 1 to 4 have the highest rate of drowning. On average, two kids under the age of 4, and ten under the age of 18 die from drowning each day in the U.S. Many more that survive drowning can face long term health problems. Most of these drownings happen in backyard pools, merely because they are much more common. Farm ponds can be just as dangerous.

In the winter ponds are likely even more dangerous for slightly older kids. It can be fun to slide around on the ice, but it rarely gets cold for long enough here to freeze ice thick. It needs to be at least 4 inches thick across the entire pond. Something we haven't seen here for a long time. Beneath that ice is deep water or thick mud, both of which are barely above freezing temperatures.

Keeping a pond or pool safer for toddlers and young children will often involve a fence. CDC also stated that a completely fenced off pool reduces the risk of drowning by 83%. That's not an absolute, but is a huge risk reduction. Fences can be expensive, but there are several cheaper options depending on how permanent they need to be or how nice they look. Of course, it's also important to teach young kids how to swim as well. Drowning is another leading cause of death and injury for kids ages 5 to 14.

On the pricier and prettier side, we have wrought iron, wooden panels, and chain link fences. Wrought iron fencing, as the name suggests, is iron or steel but has been galvanized dipped, and painted to prevent rusting. Aluminum fencing or chain link are other slightly cheaper choices.

Whichever the metal, these are more for the yard because they look nice but are considerably more expensive. Wooden panel fences are similar but can have all sorts of designs and styles. Remember though, this is to keep kids out of things. It doesn't need to be all that tall, but it can't

have kid-sized holes.

On the cheaper side, we have fences used mostly for livestock. Stock wire panels are those steel semi-flexible panels composed of thin bars in squares, often used for goat and sheep pens. Chicken wire to rolled mesh fences are cheap but require a fair amount of support posts. Plastic mesh fence can be cheaper, but this isn't going to stand up long or might not even stop a determined toddler. This is more useful for keeping chickens in a pen or rabbits out of a garden. Barbed wire and panels might be common in cattle operations but aren't spaced to stop kids.

If you have enough time, there are natural options as well. Plenty of bushes can grow thick enough to act as a nearly impenetrable fence. Japanese holly, barberry, or forsythia can grow pretty thick and have spring flowers or fall color. If you want that fancy old English look, shaped privet hedges or boxwood can add fancy design. However, all of these require at least a few years of foresight before growing together enough to cover any gaps.

No matter what fence you choose, the most important thing is that it's there to keep those speedy toddlers from getting hurt. I hope that my exploration of fencing ideas for my own pond has given you ideas for your own. Everyone has their own style, price points, and access to materials. Mostly the point of this article was to bring attention to the dangers that water features, including farm ponds, can present to children, and to get people thinking about their own protection measures. For me personally, I'm considering a wood-slatted snow fence with some enforcing wire. It only needs to be semi-permeant, but on the cheaper side and held up with T-posts. After all, my pond is 500 feet long, and someday he'll be old enough that no fence will be able to stop him.

If you have any questions about fencing or farm safety, please give us a call at 620-724-8233 or email me at jcoover@ksu.edu.

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