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Amay, 2, and Amelia, 4, love swimming and playing in the chemical-free pool.
Picture: Iain Gillespie



Pases Aqua converted this western suburbs client's old dam into a refreshing natural swimming dam at their holiday property in Yallingup.



Another example of a natural pool installed by Liam McRae, owner of Landscape West, in a garden designed by Tristan Peirce from TPLA.



Dean Herath from Pases Aqua, pictured, converted this Perth client's concrete pool into a freshwater natural pool in 2025.

DIP YOUR TOES INTO A FRESH TAKE ON POOLS

KATIE HAMPSON

Goodbye green hair and stinging eyes.

A growing number of Perth homeowners are taking the plunge and installing eco-friendly freshwater swimming pools full of plants and wildlife.

Some are even having their existing chlorinated ones converted.

Acquatic biologist Dean Herath, managing director of Pases Aqua, told Western Suburbs Weekly he has been draining quite a few pools lately so his clients can start over with aquatic plants and beneficial microorganisms to create a healthier, freshwater swimming experience.

Though the pools generally cost 20-40 per cent more to install than a fibreglass pool, he was seeing a trend away from traditional backyard pools and their usual cocktail of chemicals, which could benefit wildlife and swimmers' health.

"The biggest benefit I see is that it allows people to relax, de-stress and reconnect with nature," Dr Herath said.

"The sound of water and seeing plants, insects and dragonflies really creates a sense of peace.

"And fauna will establish in the system, like dragonfly larvae, beetles, water boatman and the occasional turtle so it suits people that loves nature."

He added some of his western suburbs clients with properties in the South West have also been engaging him to convert their dams into 'swimming dams' so their families can safely bathe and frolic in their crystal-clear waters.

Dr Herath, who has a keen interest in water quality, native fish and natural ecosystems, said he created a natural swimming dam concept to improve the water quality of private dams and local government lakes.

"I just thought people have dips in their dams so why don't we improve the water quality and term it a 'natural swimming dam'," he explained.

"I've been doing this mostly on larger block holiday homes and farms down south in places like Bunker Bay, Margaret River and Denmark.

"But I also fly in to amazing places like Byron Bay, the Gold Coast and Sydney, because people over there also love the idea of converting their farm dams into a dam with really good water quality that they can swim in."

He said most dams in WA were highly degraded with no plants or aeration.

Cattle also destroy the water quality and one of the first steps towards improving dams is to exclude stock from them.

Dr Herath said he often fences dams off and pumps some of their freshwater into nearby troughs that cattle can drink from.

"This allows plants to establish, wildlife to come back into the system and recovery to begin of the wetland ecosystems and aquatic fauna we have lost," he added.

"Adding aeration, planting more plants, introducing bacteria and enzymes all help improve water quality and create an environment that could be swimmable with time.

"The idea is that clients will soon be swimming in a freshwater billabong with plants, fish and water."

Natural swimming ponds typically start at about $50,000 to install.

But the final cost will depend on their size, their construction requirements and the filtration method used and will skyrocket for a large rock pool, requiring heavy machinery and intense labour.

Owners can also expect some algae, especially in the first year or two as the systems can take that long to establish.

And they may not be the only ones swimming: Frogs, ducks and low numbers of fish may live there, if owners are happy to mingle with them.

Dr Herath creates natural pools that do not contain chlorine or other chemical additives used in traditional pools. Instead, he installs a submerged vegetation zone to filter nutrients in the water, similar to what exists in natural lakes.

He said Australia has been slower than Europe to catch on to sustainable swimming pools but he is glad to see more of them making their way into local gardens.

"Natural pools started in Austria and Germany," he said.

"They have approved public natural pools all over the place in Europe but these have now rapidly spread across America and are starting to become popular in Australia."

He said visually, natural pools were "absolutely stunning".

They could look similar to Claude Monet's placid lily pond images painted at his gardens in Giverny or more like a rock pool surrounded by lush greenery, depending on the client's preference.

Landscape West owner Liam McRad, along with landscape architect Tristan Peirce from TPLA, have also been busy creating some striking and beautiful natural pools around Perth and the South West that connect to their surroundings.

Mr McRae uses Biotop advanced ecological filtering technology to ensure the water in his natural pools remains clean and fresh without needing chemicals.

He has also noticed natural pools are making inroads in a market dominated by rectangular chlorinated pools.

"The water is softer to swim in and good for the skin," he said.

"This style of pool also feels like a natural part of your garden because of the way it is thoughtfully incorporated into your landscape.

"The visual effect is stunning and also very soothing and calming to look at."

Dr Herath said swimming in natural pools unleashes a feeling that can't be achieved in chlorinated water.

"There are so many benefits to having a natural pool in your garden," Dr Herath said.

"For starters, you don't have harsh chemicals that can irritate the skin — it's just pure freshwater.

"They also look far more attractive with lush plant life and, maybe, some small fish if the customer wants this.

"It also allows you to connect to nature and expect to see animals start to get into it like dragonflies, frogs and even the occasional turtle.

"Most Australians love an eco-friendly option and this is also one that doesn't require as much maintenance.

"It also suits people who love swimming in natural lakes.

"If you like doing that, you will love having your own natural swimming pond at home."

BENEFITS OF NATURAL POOLS:

LOWER LONG-TERM COSTS
No ongoing chemical expenses and reduced water replacement needs, saving you money over time.

NO HARSH CHEMICALS
You'll be swimming in chemical-free water that's gentle on skin, eyes and the environment. With the right filtration technology, you will minimise the chances of harmful pathogens or bacteria.
"Many people have allergies to chlorine, so without chlorine you get less or no skin irritation," Dr Herath said.

SUPPORTS BIODIVERSITY
Create a thriving ecosystem that attracts beneficial insects, birds and native wildlife.
"Fauna will establish the system like dragonfly larvae, beetles, water boatman and the occasional turtle so it suits people that loves nature," Dr Herath said.

FEELS CLOSER TO NATURE
Transforms your backyard into a stunning natural landscape that changes with the seasons and helps wildlife.
"The biggest benefit I see is that it allows people to relax, destress and reconnect with nature," Dr Herath said.
"The sound of water and seeing plants, insects and dragonflies really creates a sense of peace."

DOWNSIDES OF NATURAL POOLS:

ALGAE
Expect some algae, especially in the first year or two as these systems can take that long to establish.
You will get a biofilm grow on the walls but the water should be crystal-clear.
In time, the plants will outcompete any stringy algae that develops. It's called the nitrogen cycle and this typically takes at least three to six months to achieve a good balance.

MORE EXPENSIVE TO INSTALL
Dr Herath said the price tag for a natural swimming pond typically starts at around $50,000.
You'll pay between 20 per cent and 40 per cent more than if you are installing a fibreglass pool.
Final costs depend on size, construction requirements and the filtration method.
They will start skyrocketing if you go for a large rock pool which requires heavy machinery and intense labour, even though it will look beautiful.



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