

Pond Palace – Part 1

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Welcome to Once Upon a Meadow. Our stories are written for the ear, so for those able, we recommend listening while reading along. Transcripts may contain minor errors; please check the audio before quoting.

“Please, don’t leave,” said Beaver. He realized he had been thinking only of what he desired, not what the community required. And what the community required was a thriving wetland and clean water. Which he had been providing all along.

He paused and slapped his tail on the water, “I need to make things whole again.”

As his friends watched, Beaver began to tear down enough of his dam to drain the carrot and clover patch. The plants would soon recover. And the wet soil would be soft enough for Turtle to dig into when winter came. Next, Beaver used the extra branches from his dam to build a shady cover over the stream for Trout. Then Beaver swam lickety-split down the stream. Soon he returned, waddling along the bank with a load of uprooted tree sprouts.

“I gathered these saplings from along the stream,” explained Beaver.

Grandmother Turtle cocked her head, and Beaver quickly continued: “I made sure to ask their permission, to give thanks, and to take less than half. Now, I’m going to plant them where I cut down too many aspens and willows.” Beaver understood that while aspens and willows normally regrow from their roots, his excessive harvest had disrupted the natural process. They would need to be replanted.

“I will work with you,” said Grandmother Turtle, starting to dig in the damp soil.

“Me too!” said Rabbit. They took one of the seedlings over to the hole Turtle had made.

Trout couldn’t get out of the water to help because – well – she’s a fish. So she made up a song as her contribution. And as the animals worked, they joined in.

(Animals sing, to the tune of “Row, Row, Row Your Boat”)

Plant, plant, plant your tree
Gently by the pond
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Nature will respond.

Plant, plant, plant your tree
Gently by the pond
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily
Nature will respond.

The animals found that nothing lifts your spirits like singing a song while working together for a common purpose. Of course, there was also some playful splashing along the streambank.

After the others went home, Beaver climbed onto his dam. It was back to its original size and quite big enough for his needs. During the day, he'd come to understand that the other animals admired him not for what he owned, but how he behaved. He realized that respect comes from working hard, being true to yourself, and caring for others.

In a few years, the saplings had grown enough to provide shade along the bank for Trout and moist soil for Turtle. By then, Beaver had found a mate and fathered a litter of kits, which is what we call a batch of baby beavers. Beaver passed along the principles of an honorable harvest, which all creatures — even people — know somewhere deep inside. So when his children and grandchildren left home to cut down trees for their own dams, you can be sure that they always asked permission, gave thanks, and took no more than was needed.