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The Handyman France Idiots' Guide to Maintaining a Pool

Please note that much of the following applies to private pools only. If your pool is deemed to be 'public' (e.g. used in a Gîte complex) different rules apply.



The first thing to remember is that if the water is clear and clean, there isn't much wrong with it. Second, whatever chemicals you add, and in whatever quantities, you're unlikely to do permanent harm. Care is needed though. Especially in its' liquid form, pH minus is highly acidic and will burn your hands. Liquid active oxygen is also hazardous, so be be careful. Third, all pools are different. Identical pools in neighbouring properties will give different chemical readings and have different amounts of FOD (Foreign Objects and Debris (dirt, leaves etc.)). Some pools need to run with higher chlorine levels to stay clean, whilst others will happily run on virtually zero chlorine for a couple of weeks without apparent ill-effects.



Don't be intimidated by the technology. In the pump room, you should see what appears to be a mass of valves. How to use these is explained later.



The daily checks first -

1. Ensure the skimmers are clear and at least reasonably clean. This is vital if you have one of those pools that has a filter bag, as the skimmer is the only means of filtration.
2. Visual check - is the water clear and clean? Can you see the bottom of the pool, regardless of how deep it is? If not, the filter probably needs cleaning (backwash and rinse).

3. Remove any FOD.
4. Chemical checks need not be done daily unless you're really bored or just trying to get used to maintaining a pool. The colour test tube kits are cheap (around 5€) and perfectly adequate. Digital testers are more accurate, but cost around 60€. The chlorine level should be around 1-3 ppm (parts per million); the pH at 7.0 - 7.8, with 7.2 being generally recognised as perfect.



Weekly (or as needed) *in this sequence* -

1. Check the filter in the pump body. Remove it and clean it if necessary.
2. Vacuum the floor and sides, though the sides are probably easier to brush. If you have a robot, so much the better.
3. Backwash and rinse. Even if the pool hasn't been used much. The amount of FOD blown into a pool is unaffected by lack of use (arguably worse as no one would bother to clear it out unless they intended to use it), though sunscreen etc. is obviously worse with heavy use. In any event, it's as well to have a routine - backwash and rinse every Sunday, say, and then you don't forget when it was done last. Stop each part of this process when the water in the sight glass (usually on the multivalve) is running clean and clear.
4. Check the filter in the pump body again. Clean it if necessary.
5. Replace the water you've just pumped out during the backwash and rinse!
6. With the filter bag system, change the bag and/or clean it. Either a hose, or a 40° synthetic rapid wash.
7. Check chemicals, and add chlorine, pH+ or pH- accordingly.

General stuff -

1. Your pump should have a timer on the control panel. Use it. A safe bet is to run the pump for around 12 hours per day, but again, different pools have differing requirements. There are several equations used by some for calculating the hours needed - 1/3 of the water temperature (in °C) is the simplest; others are much more complex, and needlessly so. I think 12 hours will do most pools, though some need longer.
2. Assuming you don't have an automatic chemical dispense, remember that all chemicals go into the skimmer. *Never, ever throw chlorine tablets into the pool.* Nor pH- as it's extremely acidic.
3. Maintaining a high enough level of the sanitising agent (chlorine etc.) is vital, even if it's only you who uses it. But what about the odd passing rodent? Rat and mouse urine, even in small quantities in pools, can cause Weil's disease amongst other things. I did spell 'passing' right - I double checked.
4. Vacuuming the pool - insert the hose vertically so that all air is expelled.

It can either be connected to the *balai* point on the side of the pool, or to a skimmer (if you have more than one skimmer the other(s) need to be blocked); only the *balai* valve should be open if using the proper *balai* point.

5. Constantly running high chlorine levels, or shocking too often, can harm the liner, not only fading its' colour, but also making it brittle.
6. Don't be tempted to use cheap chemicals from the supermarkets or DIY stores. Results are erratic and the chlorine tablets don't last long. A good quality *chlore lent* tablet should last about a week and give stable chlorine readings when the water is tested.

A few words about the valves. You will probably have three valves on the pipework, usually with blue handles. (If you're lucky, you have a fourth valve on the waste pipe.) One is for the *balai*; one is for the *bonde de fonde*; the other for the skimmers. Their positions for vacuuming are described in item 4 above. For normal use, only the *balai* valve should be closed. Many pools like to have the *bonde de fonde* valve half closed, but not all. Though not essential, it's a good idea to have the pump turned off when resetting these valves.

It is essential that the pump is turned off when turning the multivalve on the filter. Inside the unit is a gasket that unseats itself quite easily. It is often impossible to reseat it afterwards. The usual settings for this valve are, starting at 12 o'clock with the filtration position and working clockwise - filtration; waste; off; backwash; recycle; rinse. Normally, you only need to use the filtration, backwash and rinse settings.



It is always a good idea is to have a valve fitted to the waste pipe. If the gasket in the multivalve fails or becomes unseated, the pool will pump itself dry in a few hours. With a valve fitted and in the closed position except when backwashing/rinsing/pumping to waste (deliberately), filtration will be slightly affected but you won't lose valuable water.

And that's most of the basic stuff you need to know. If you suffer an algae bloom, just use a lot of *chlore choc* - you'll need to adjust the pH after the algae has gone. If you have one of the so-called 'sheet' algae that sticks to the liner but leaves the water clear, sweep it into the water so that the chlorine etc. can kill it (you'll need to shock the pool for a result). Some pieces of utterly useless information for you, that will impress your friends if you have any left after boring them with the first one or two. There are over 20,000 recorded types of algae in the world; almost every drop of naturally occurring water on the planet has algae spores in it; only a handful of the 20,000 types infect swimming pools; none of those are harmful to human health; there is anecdotal evidence that algae spores 'piggy-back' on leaves, pollen etc. into pools.