

# BACKYARD BLITZ

## Revisiting Old Friends

Since March 2000, 50 gardens across Australia have been madeover by the Backyard Blitz team. With a combined total of 5600 hours worked on the tools, some impressive results have been achieved.

More than 6000 plants have been installed and 150 tonnes of soil and 210 cubic metres of mulch spread. The team has laid 1250m<sup>2</sup> of paving, 550m<sup>2</sup> of decking and used more than 100,000 nails. Add to that load, 50 tonnes of brickies sand, 60 tonnes of concrete, 30 water features and 25 pergolas. After all of that effort the team decided it was time to take a breather and revisit some of the gardens they've created and check in on the friends they've made along the way.

## Adapting these plans to your garden

Make a detailed scale drawing of your backyard (eg 1:100) showing the location of the house and major features then incorporate the desired elements from our makeover. As your garden will be a different size you will need to estimate the amounts of materials you will require.

**Note:** On your plan show the locations of any services (water pipes, sewerage, power, phone, etc) so you can avoid damaging them during the makeover.

Permits and approval: Check with your local council regarding regulations about garden structures and elements such as decking or pergolas. There are limits on what you can build without council permission as some structures may impede neighbours enjoyment of their property or may be unsafe. Seek advice from a licenced professional prior to commencing work.

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## Garden therapy

The biggest makeover ever attempted was the rooftop courtyard at the Royal Brisbane Children's Hospital. Three storeys above ground with materials lowered in by crane and limited access through the hospital lifts and corridors was a challenge for the whole team.

This garden makeover was inspired by the courage of Cameron Zipf, a young man injured in a family farm accident. Cameron was told he would never walk again and would only be able to communicate by blinking his eyes. Proving even medical experts wrong, Cameron continues to improve and is an inspiration to all who meet him.



Six months after completion the garden is performing well and receives constant use by recovering children and their families. The popularity of the garden has meant that the foot traffic has worn the

paving paint from the floor of the courtyard and required a new floor covering to be installed. The aviary houses more than 60 budgies and provides the cheerful sounds of birdsong throughout the nearby wards and offices.

Jamie and Scott each had some extra touches to add to the garden.

**Wetpour rubber flooring:** a softfall flooring system installed by Gadsby Surface Solutions provides a forgiving, non-slip floor perfectly suited to this space. The coloured rubber particles are mixed with a polyurethane binder and trowelled into place using a steel trowel. Available in plain primary colours or with flecks of other colours throughout the rubber can be moulded to any shape following the contours of the sub-base.



The courtyard cost \$120 per square metre to lay. The system meets Australian Standards for use beneath children's play equipment and has a range of other uses such as swimming pool surrounds, pathways and beneath trees. Call Gadsby Surface Solutions in Sydney on (02) 9620 9550 for more details or view the website at [www.softfall.com.au](http://www.softfall.com.au)

**Aviary roof:** a clear polycarbonate roof provides weatherproof accommodation for the budgies but the Queensland sun is proving too harsh. Scott Cam removed the old roof, installed a roll of insulation blanket (Bradfords Anticon insulation) and refitted a tinted polycarbonate roof with roofing screws. The insulation will reduce the temperature entering through the roof in summer and retain some of the warmth generated within the aviary during winter. Polycarbonate roofing is available in a range of colours, profiles and with varying levels of UV protection. It costs about \$18 per square metre and is available at large hardware stores.



**Planting:** all of the plants are performing well with one exception. The ground covering *Scirpus* 'Fairylights' have suffered from overexposure in full sun and have been replaced with a hardy ground cover *Alternanthera dentata* var *tricolor*. **Blitz Tipz** When planting newly purchased nursery plants in the garden remember the environment they came from in the nursery. Plants from nursery shadehouses will need some time to acclimatise in your garden and may perform best if slowly introduced.

**Garden furniture:** stylish jarrah furniture worth \$2000 was donated to the hospital by the Outdoor Furniture Store in Brisbane.

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This garden on the fourth floor terrace of an apartment block on Sydney's northern beaches posed access difficulties as well. All materials were brought in by a materials hoist temporarily erected on the outside of the building. A drab hot terrace was transformed into a stylish outdoor room with spectacular views to the Sydney city skyline.



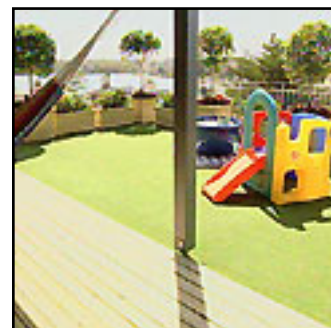
A new addition to the family is the most exciting development in this garden particularly as the new family member was conceived on Fred and Robbie's Backyard Blitz weekend away. Named after a member of the team, Hamish is Scottish for James.

Jamie, Scott and Jody fertilised and pruned the potted plants and drove in a few extruding nails on the deck.

**Looking after potted plants:** Jamie fertilised all plants using a slow release fertiliser for pots. Slow release fertilisers need applying about three times a year and will deliver a safe and steady dose of fertiliser directly to the roots. Lazy gardeners can also purchase 'once a year' slow release fertiliser for pots. Jamie noticed some yellowing between the leaf veins on the potted *Gardenia augusta* 'Florida' and recommends an application of Epsom salts at a rate of 10g per litre of water to correct this magnesium deficiency. **Blitz Tipz** Potted plants require more care than those planted in the ground as they are totally dependent on you for their water and fertilising needs.

**Deck maintenance:** over time some nails may rise from the timber decking boards they have been nailed into. To remove this tripping hazard simply knock nail heads back into the timber with a hammer, you may also need to use a nail punch. Scott always uses stainless steel spiral shanked nails to avoid this problem. **Blitz Tipz** When installing a large area of decking hire a nail gun and compressor for about \$150 a day.

**Kangaroo climber:** lightweight children's play equipment is available in a great range of styles and colours to suit all ages. The Kangaroo climber we gave to Andi and Hamish cost \$380 from Judius in Sydney. Phone (02) 9557 5144 for further details.



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## Tropical Toddlers

Of all the gardens revisited none had shown such a dramatic change as the tropical garden designed for Sascha Kennedy and her two beautiful daughters. After nearly 2 years the garden has begun to resemble the tropical paradise envisaged by designer Colin Brown. The lilly pilly and tree ferns have trebled in size and screened views of the adjacent brick walls and fencelines. Sascha has created a dense lilly pilly hedge around the paved seating area through regular pruning and fertilising. Such good care has been taken of the garden that there was little for the team to do.



**Top dressing a lawn:** Nigel noticed the lawn had become patchy and worn beneath the children's swing set. After watering the lawn, Nigel applied lawn fertiliser (Shirley's No.17) at a rate of 50g per square metre and followed up with another deep watering. A 80/20 mix (80% river sand/ 20% black soil) spread evenly over the low and worn areas to a depth of 15-20mm will level out the top surface.  
**Blitz Tipz** It is not necessary to top-dress your lawn every year. It only needs to be done to fill any low points and to level the surface.

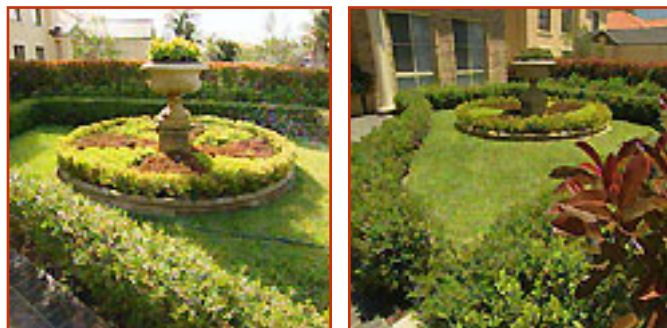
**Planting:** as a garden evolves new opportunities for planting arise. The scaly tree ferns (*Cyathea cooperi*) in this garden are now creating a canopy and have left room for some new underplanting beneath. Jody has selected some colourful bromeliad hybrids and some gristle ferns (*Blechnum cartilagineum*) to fill the voids created by the maturing ferns. A top up of mulch (Forest fines) will insulate the garden soil and help keep weed regrowth to a minimum.

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## Up Front

In a Backyard Blitz first the team undertook a front-yard makeover at this new property. A little over one and half years on and the garden is well established providing a formal entrance to Mark and Penny Horsnell's new home. Jamie and Jody added some professional touches to keep the garden looking its best and were pleased to leave it in Mark and Penny's capable hands.



**Hedge pruning:** the aim of formal hedging is to create a row of densely growing plants that meet and provide a framework to the rest of the garden. To promote density of growth it is important to begin pruning while plants are young. Prune hedging plants after their first flush of new growth at the end of spring and again at the end of summer to create a lush dense hedge.

**Blitz Tipz** To encourage vigorous growth up the sides of the hedge prune the top a little narrower than the base so that the whole plant receives an even amount of sunlight.

**Replanting urns:** the central urn is a focal point of the garden and a perfect position for colourful annuals. Jamie removed the spent annuals and replaced them with flowering cockscomb (*Celosia*

*cristata*) . **Blitz Tipz** When planting out containers use a good quality potting mix as they promote good drainage and many contain water saving crystals to keep the mix moist.

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## Japanese Garden

A small oddly shaped courtyard presented landscape designer Colin Brown with an opportunity to create an intimate space behind this townhouse on the NSW Central Coast. Immaculately maintained this garden has been made more attractive year round by the installation of low voltage lighting.

**Slippery stepping stones:** the large smooth granite stepping stones are slippery when wet and in need of some grip. Nigel applied Slip Grip with a sponge to the surface of the steppers. Slip Grip and similar products are available in the paint section of good hardware stores and cost from \$23 for 1 litre.

**Low voltage lighting:** based on the same principles as low voltage pumps for garden water features, the majority of this lighting system can be installed by any home handyperson. A low voltage transformer plugged into a power point or hard wired in by a licenced electrician reduces the household power to 12 or 24 volts. Low voltage cabling laid out and connected to each lamp with heat shrink kits provides a weather proof seal and powers each light. The total cost for this lighting was \$1500 including hire of an electrician. All materials were supplied by Lights For You in Sydney. Phone (02) 9956 8988 for advice and product details. **Blitz Tipz** Discuss your project with a lighting professional as many different effects can be achieved with different lamp and light types.



**Bonsai maintenance:** garden owners Ken and Keryn are lovers of bonsai plants. Bonsai expert Quang Tran offered some advice to Jody and helped to rewire and prune a *Camellia sasanqua* specimen. **Blitz Tipz** Check under Nurseries - Retail in your local Yellow Pages for specialist bonsai nurseries and suppliers. Excellent starter kits can be purchased from around \$20 at specialist nurseries.

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## Baby Blitz

Over the last 50 episodes the team have had plenty of surprises but none bigger than the birth of a baby while they Blitzed this backyard. Helen and David Brooks left on a weekend getaway as a couple and returned as a family to their new garden.



In just over twelve months the garden has grown considerably and provided a safe haven to the Brooks family. Based in sandy soils the garden is well drained and dries out quickly. To combat this the team installed an automated irrigation system and a few specimen plants to top up the garden.

**Irrigation:** garden irrigation is relatively simple to install provided you follow the basic principles. Effective irrigation requires sufficient water flow to ensure water is spread to all plants. Measure your water pressure by turning the garden tap on full and timing how long it takes to fill a 10 litre bucket. This will enable you to calculate your water flow in litres per minute and design your irrigation accordingly. Always install a backflow prevention device at your tap to stop contaminated water flowing back into the drinkable supply (this is required by law). The irrigation components for this garden cost about \$680 and are available from specialty irrigation outlets. Check under Irrigation in your local *Yellow Pages* for outlets. **Blitz Tipz** A programmable battery operated tap timer will automatically open a valve to water the garden when you can't - they cost from \$90.

To view the original Fact Sheet [click here](#).

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## Acknowledgements

The Backyard Blitz team have made many new friends and enjoyed surprising their makeover victims. Special thanks go to the garden designers and all those family and friends who help set up the surprises. We hope you have enjoyed the first 50 Episodes and we look forward to bringing you many more exciting garden designs and surprises in our next series. You never know, you may come home to find the Backyard Blitz team in your backyard!

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