

BACKYARD BLITZ

Level Pleasure



Accessibility and practical recreation areas are essential elements in any good garden design. Unfortunately Mark and Raja Relf's garden contained none of these elements. A functional backyard is critical for Mark and Raja, who are both wheelchair bound, but a swimming pool and spa they rarely used took up most of the space in their garden.

Family friend, Pat Buonincontri, has helped the Relf's in many ways over the years, but felt that solving this problem was out of his league. So Pat wrote to Backyard Blitz asking us to cover the pool and spa to create a level area where the Relf's can relax and entertain their friends.

Landscape designer, Greg Bell, from Rare Earth Landscape Design, solved the accessibility problem by incorporating a timber deck over the pool to meet existing levels of paving and to create a single level garden. The spa was transformed into a new sandstone and timber water feature. A window was replaced by an aluminium sliding door, giving easy access from the house to the deck via a timber ramp. Perimeter plantings provide fragrance and privacy, while a shade sail gives protection from the hot sun. If necessary, the pool can be reinstated simply by removing the floating deck and repairing the core holes.



Adapting this plan to your garden

Make a detailed scale drawing of your backyard (eg 1:100) showing the location of the house or main buildings and other major features, then incorporate the desired elements from our makeover. As your backyard 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: many backyard structures require council approval, as they can impact on your neighbours. For example, new decks may overlook neighbours if not designed properly. Always

discuss your plans with your local council and neighbours before you start building in the backyard.

Getting started

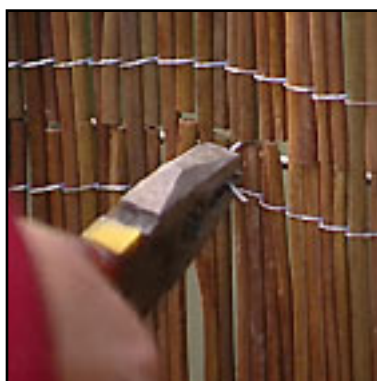
The pool was drained and all pumps and filters disconnected. An arborist removed some existing palms to make way for the new planting scheme. 150mm diameter holes were drilled in the bottom of the pool to release ground water pressure and avoid the concrete pool shell floating out of the ground.

Materials

Deck: No posts or bearers were required for this deck, as the coping of the pool provided a level foundation from which to work. Scott used pak wedges to level oversized joists (H3, 190x45mm) laid from one side of the pool to the other. The joists were laid at 300mm centres and connected with noggins (H3, 190x45mm) between each joist to give rigidity and strength to the frame. Treated pine decking boards (90x20mm) laid perpendicular to the joists were nailed in place with spiral shanked cup head nails. A self-starting sump pump placed in the deep end of the pool will remove water as it collects. **Blitz Tipz:** Scott installed a trapdoor in the deck at the shallow end of the pool, allowing access under the deck to service the pump or to collect items that may fall through.



Natureed fencing: the existing fences gave only limited privacy, so Nigel installed a stylish, Natureed fence. The framework consisted of galvanised pipes (40mm) installed in-ground in quick-setting concrete, with a rail connected across the top with downee fittings. Wire rope was stretched taut between the posts, as attachment points for the Natureed rolls. The job was finished with Natureed cut lengthways and rolled across the top to protect the ends from the weather. **Blitz Tipz:** Natureed is available in a range of sizes to minimise cutting and wastage. Purchase a roll size closest to your fence height - Nigel used 1.83m x 3.66m rolls.



Water feature: Jamie transformed the spa at the end of the pool into an attractive water feature. To minimise water depth and maximise safety, the spa was half filled with sand. A length of recycled hardwood (200x200mm) was installed vertically in a large collar of quick setting concrete and backfilled further with sand. An EPDM 1.2mm thick rubber liner was slipped over the top of the timber and spread over the edge of the spa, then held in place with sandstone ballast. A rock-faced sandstone tablet (500x500x75mm) connected to the top of the post supports a sandstone sphere (250mm diameter). A low voltage submersible pump circulates water through a non-kink hose (20mm) up the back of the timber post. The water then flows out the top of the sandstone sphere and cascades in a sheet back into the pool beneath. **Blitz Tipz:** Consider the final height from which water will fall in this type of water feature. If the fall is greater than about 1.5m, too much of the water will be blown away and you will need to constantly refill the pond.



Garden beds: the tiled pool surround had to be broken up with a jackhammer and removed, while low brick walls were constructed around the air vents beneath the house to maintain ventilation. An organic soil mix was brought in to create new planting beds. To prevent soil washing from the garden beds into the empty pool and to protect the end grain of the joists, fibre cement sheeting was tacked to the ends of the joists with galvanised clouts. Horticultural grade pine bark was spread to a depth of 75mm to insulate the soil and provide a neutral backdrop to the lush, tropical inspired planting. **Blitz Tipz:** Some organic soil mixes have uncomposted manures in them, which may burn sensitive roots on new plants. Do not plant straight into a mix that seems particularly fresh. Instead, leave the mix in place for a few weeks before planting.

Shade sail: to provide much needed shade, a large triangular shade sail (5m, Rivergum) was installed. It was connected to the rear of the house, and to a steel post (100mm diameter) installed in-ground in concrete. **Blitz Tipz:** Some shade structures can be connected to the rear of the house and thus reduce the number of posts required. Attachment points need to be solid. A qualified builder or architect should be consulted if you are unsure about positioning or attaching connectors.

Planter boxes: pre-fabricated planter boxes added colour and texture to the garden and deck, at a level easily accessible to Mark and Raja. The planters were made to order and measure 500x500x2000mm. Adjustable feet allow for level placement on uneven sites. **Blitz Tipz:** Pots and planters require more regular watering and fertilising than in-ground garden beds, as potting mix can dry out quickly and plants quickly use up available nutrients.



Plants

A combination of evergreen shrubs and palms was chosen to maintain the laid-back feel in this compact backyard.

Trees: lilly pilly (*Syzygium paniculatum* 'Narrowleaf')

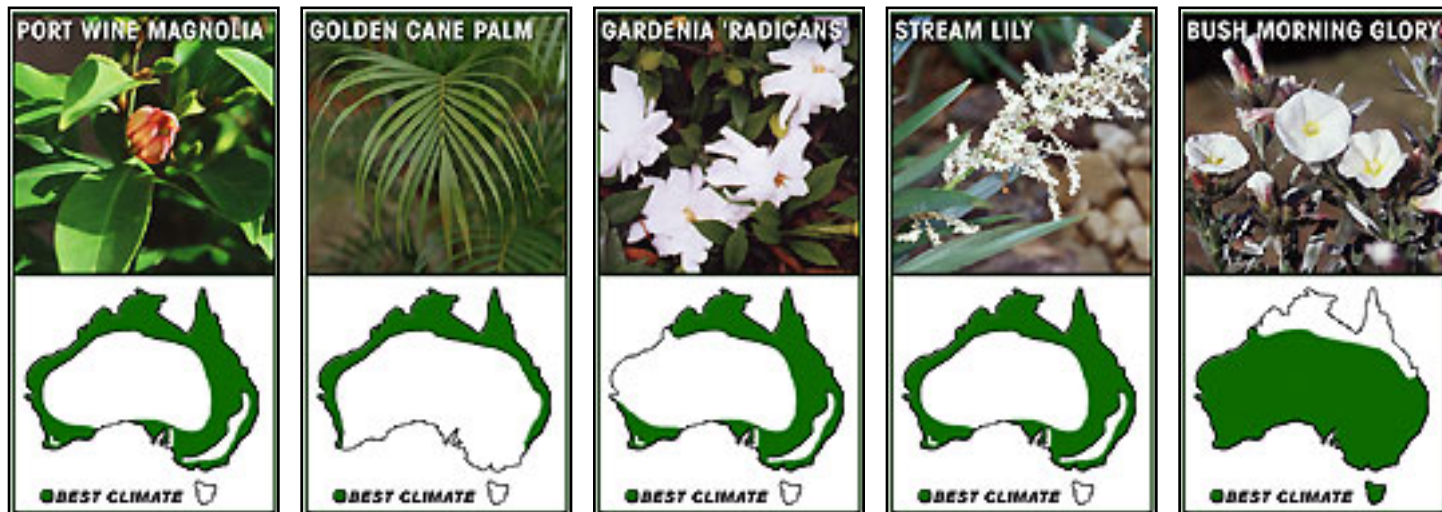
Palms: parlour palm (*Chamaedorea elegans*), golden cane palm (*Dypsis lutescens*)

Shrubs: hebe 'Wiri Cloud' (*Hebe venustula* 'Wiri Cloud'), port-wine magnolia (*Michelia figo*), philodendron (*Philodendron* 'Xanadu'), sago palm (*Cycas revoluta*), murraya (*Murraya paniculata*)

Perennials: lomandra (*Lomandra longifolia*), stream lily (*Helmholtzia glaberrima*)

Groundcovers: bush morning glory (*Convolvulus cneorum*), gardenia (*Gardenia augusta* 'Radicans')

Herbs: parsley, spinach, lemon grass, curry plant, oregano, dill



Cost and availability

We used mature plants in our makeover to create an instant effect for television, so our total cost for plants and materials was \$12,365. This cost could be reduced to \$9731 by using smaller plants.

Product details

- Pre-fabricated planter boxes cost about \$650 each and can be made to most styles and sizes. They can be coloured to match any colour in the Dulux paint range. Call Urban Ponds on (03) 5979 7590 or view the website at www.urbanponds.com.au for more details.
- Sandstone feature elements were supplied by Gosford Quarries at a cost of \$400. Call head office on (02) 4340 1158 for more information.
- Shade sails are manufactured by Coolaroo and are available at large hardware outlets. The 5m triangular sail costs about \$190 and is available in four colours. View the website at www.coolaroo.com or phone Toll Free: 1800 331 521 for more details.
- All components for the water feature are available from Contour Ponds in Sydney. Phone: (02) 9690 2600 for prices and details of their other products.
- Most of the plants we used are readily available at nurseries. If unavailable, ask your nursery to order them for you or advise on similar varieties suited to your area. You may need to contact specialist nurseries for some plants. Your local nursery should be able to provide you with contacts.
- Most other materials such as mulch and pebbles are available from large hardware stores and building or landscape suppliers.
- All tools used are commonly available for hire, including the nail gun and the concrete auger.

Getaway details

The Sebel Kirkton Park
Oakey Creek Rd
Pokolbin
Hunter Valley
Phone: (02) 4998 7680

Australia In Style
2002 winner International Special Events Award
Phone: (02) 9310 0200
Fax: (02) 9310 0999
website: www.australiainstyle.com.au

The Cellar Restaurant
Broke Rd
Pokolbin
Hunter Valley
Phone: (02) 4998 7584

Acknowledgments

Design by Rare Earth Landscape Design.
Phone: 0404 043 788
Email: gregbell@start.com.au

Construction by the Backyard Blitz team (all gardens are a gift from Backyard Blitz).

For more Step by Step Constructions [click here](#)



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