

# BACKYARD BLITZ

## The Honeymooners Garden

The Backyard Blitz team turned a neglected, uninspiring backyard into a relaxing yet stylish garden.

**Before**



**After**



The plan was to create a peaceful, romantic garden for a newly wed couple. Landscape designer Colin Brown drew up a plan which included gold decomposed granite paving, a goldfish pond, white washed paving, white picket fences and many white flowering plants.



## Materials



**Picket fence:** posts (90x90mm), rails (70x45mm), pickets (42x19mm), paint (exterior white low sheen acrylic), Rapidset cement (40kg bags), galvanised bolts and nuts (150mm) and galvanised picket nails. Tools: nail gun, spirit level, saw.

**Paving:** decomposed granite (gold) and A1 quartz sand. Tools: compacting vibrating plate and a topsoil levelling rake.

**Tile paving:** reconstituted sandstone pavers (450x450mm), white tile grout, crusher dust and A1 quartz sand. Tools: compacting vibrating plate and a topsoil levelling rake.

**Pond:** bricks (Austral dry pressed commons), brickies sand, cement, heavy duty vinyl pond liner, pond liner fixing clip, pond plants and goldfish. Tools: brickies trowel, brick saw or angle grinder, hammer.

**Garden:** bricks (Austral dry pressed commons), brickies sand and cement for edging, plants (see plan and details below), organic garden mix and pine bark mulch. Tools: brickies trowel.

**Seating area:** reconstituted sandstone bench and matching pots, Pot & Peat potting mix and white bougainvilleas.

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## Adapting this plan 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 - council permission is required to remove trees, and may be required for some structural work. Neighbours need to be consulted about new boundary fences. If they don't agree with your proposed fencing idea, you are legally entitled to build your new fence on your own property - eg just on your side of the boundary line - provided it meets local council requirements.

## Step-by-step

**Getting started:** Any rubbish, old structures, paving, weeds, etc should be removed and the site levelled. This site included a mature gum tree. It was inspected by a professional arborist who made the tree safe by removing some large branches, cutting them flush with the trunk. To find an arborist look under 'Tree Surgery' in your Yellow Pages and select members of the National Arborists Association.

## Picket fence:

**Step 1** Paint the posts, cross rails and pickets.

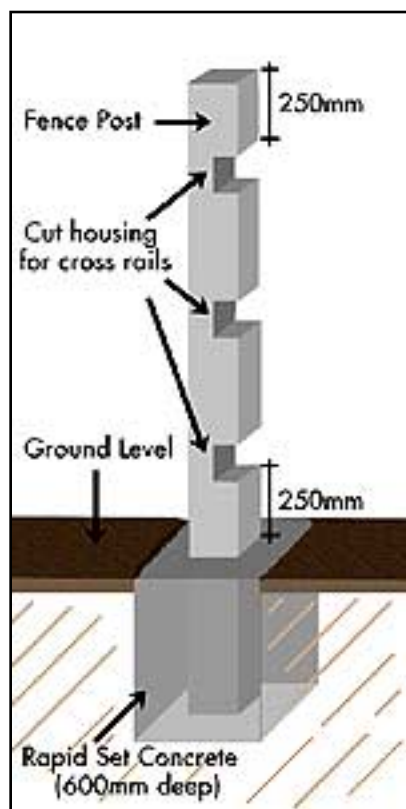
**Step 2** Using a chisel and saw cut three notches in the posts for the cross rails (called half house out). For the fence posts we made notches 250mm from the top, 250mm from ground level, and half way between the two (see diagram).

**Step 3** Use a string line to mark out the position of the end posts and use an auger or shovel to dig post holes 600mm deep.

**Step 4** Place the post in the hole. Use a spirit level to ensure the post is exactly vertical. Half fill the hole with water then tip a bag of Rapidset cement into the hole, watering as you go. The cement should be filled to the top of the hole. Hold the post in position while the cement starts to set (about 4 minutes).

**Step 5** Once the end posts are in position run 2 string lines between them (one just above ground level, the second along the top) to find the side and top levels for the intermediate posts. Repeat step 4 to put these posts in place.

**Step 6** Allow the concrete to set before continuing. If using a nail gun, allow concrete to set for at least three hours. If using a normal hammer, wait at least three days.



**Step 7** Bolt the cross rails to the posts. Use an angle grinder to cut the bolt off flush with the nut.

**Step 8** Nail the pickets to the cross rails. Use a spirit level to ensure the first one is vertical then use a picket on its edge for even spacing between each one (ie 19mm). Every 5 pickets use the spirit level again to check that the pickets are vertical. Blitz Tipz: Use galvanised nails for a long-lasting job and

to prevent rust staining.

**Step 9** Putty the nail holes in the pickets and touch up the paint.



**Garden beds and edges:** Brick edging was used to define the garden beds.

**Step 1** Mark out the corners of the beds and run top and side string lines between them. Use the string lines as guides for brick placement.

**Step 2** To form a footing for the bricks, dig a shallow (100mm) trench under the string line and compact it. Place a 75mm layer of cement (4:1 ratio of sand to cement) in the base of the trench.

**Step 3** Place a row of bricks on their edges, end to end, mortaring each end as you go. Use the string lines to keep them straight.

**Paving:** Part of the backyard was paved with decomposed granite and part with reconstituted sandstone pavers. We incorporated quartz sand into the decomposed granite in a 1:3 ratio (1 part sand to 3 parts decomposed granite) and between the pavers to give a shimmering effect.

To avoid cutting the pavers, design the area to paved to be a multiple of the paver width (plus a 5mm gap between each).

To prepare for all paving level the area, then if necessary, use a vibrating plate to compact the ground until it is solid.

### **To lay the decomposed granite:**

**Step 1** Spread a 75mm layer of decomposed granite over the entire area.

**Step 2** Spread a 25mm layer of quartz sand over the decomposed granite, rake it in thoroughly and level with a rake. Blitz Tipz: a topsoil leveller is a hand tool which makes quick work of levelling loose material like topsoil, decomposed granite, or sand and is available from hardware stores for about \$70.

**Step 3** Compact the granite with a vibrating plate to a finished depth of 75mm. Blitz Tipz: if you prefer the granite paving to be solid lightly sprinkle with off-white cement, rake it in and sprinkle with water before you compact it.



### To lay the pavers:

We used a wash made of white grout to colour the tiles for an aged Italianate effect. Mix white grout and water to form a thin paint. Broom it on each tile, sprinkle extra grout over the tile then lightly hose it off for an instant limewash look. This technique works best on porous tiles such as reconstituted sandstone and concrete.

### To lay the tiles:



**Step 1** Spread a 50mm layer of crusher dust (or river sand) over the area and level.

**Step 2** Lay the pavers into position leaving a 5mm gap between each.

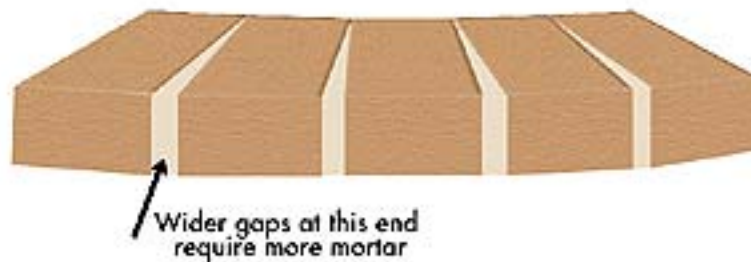
**Step 3** Sprinkle quartz sand over the pavers and sweep them to fill the gaps with the sand. Remove any excess sand.

**Pond:** We built a narrow pond around the edge of an existing raised garden bed. Built in brick, it followed the contour of the raised bed but was half the height, creating a terraced effect.





Laying bricks along a contour means that they are at an angle to each other requiring more mortar at one end than the other. The end bricks are cut to fit.



**Step 1** Level the area for the pond and mark out its shape using spray marker paint. Blitz Tipz: A garden hose can be laid along the ground in the shape of the pond. When you're happy with the shape, spray along the hose with the marker paint and remove the hose.

**Step 2** To form a footing for the bricks, dig a shallow (100mm) trench along the spray paint trail and compact it. Place a 75mm layer of mortar (4:1 ratio of sand to cement) in the base of the trench.

**Step 3** Place mortar on each side of a brick using a brickie's trowel and lay it in position. Continue laying the bricks side by side, tapping them into position with the handle of the trowel as you go. Depending on your design either use a string line or a straight edge to level the bricks.

**Step 4** Use a brick saw or angle grinder to cut the end brick to fit.

**Step 5** Lay the next layer on top of the previous with the joins off-set from the layer below.

**Step 6** The top layer is laid on its edge to give a nice finish.

**Step 7** Use a stiff brush to remove any excess mortar from the bricks. Allow the mortar to set - preferably overnight, however with care you can start working around it within a couple of hours.

### **Pond liner:**

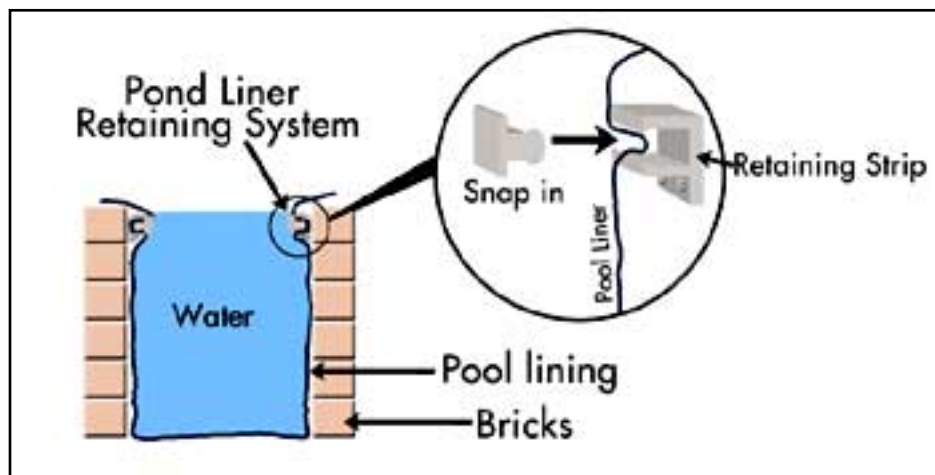
We used a heavy duty vinyl pond liner made to measure for our pond. The pond was attached to the bricks with a special clip system (see details under 'Cost and availability' below). Blitz Tipz: Always order a pond liner larger than the pond.

**Step 1** Check the pond walls and bottom removing any sharp objects which may puncture the lining. Place a 50mm layer of sand under the base of the pond liner.

**Step 2** Lay the lining in the pond and position it. Partly fill with water.

**Step 3** Fix the strip section of pond holder onto the brick wall using screws and rawl plugs. Position the top of the pond liner and fix with the snap in extrusion provided (see diagram). Cut off excess liner and conceal pond edges with stones and plants.

**Step 4** Continue filling the pond and place pond plants into the pond, leaving them in their containers. Deep water plants may be placed on the bottom of the pond. Place a brick (or two) or better still a group of stones under the pots of shallow water plants so they are just submerged. The plants we used were water lilies (deep water) and pickerel weed (shallow water). Blitz Tipz: Mulch the tops of the water plant containers with pebbles to keep the soil in place and to stop the goldfish digging.



**Step 5** In preparation for the goldfish add a water conditioner to the pond (available from an aquatic pet shop) and check pH (it should be around 7.2, if necessary adjust using products from the aquatic pet shop). To acclimatise the fish place the plastic bag containing the fish into the pond and wait 15 - 20 minutes before releasing them.

**Seating area and planting:** A 'Gothic' style reconstituted sandstone bench and matching pots formed the seating area. The pots were planted with large white bougainvilleas.

Garden beds were filled with a 50:50 mix of organic garden mix and existing soil from the site. When planting make sure the plants are at the same depth in the soil that they were in the pot. After planting the entire garden was mulched with pine bark fines to a depth of 50mm.

### Our plants (see plan):

*Camellia sasanqua* 'Pure Silk', *Hebe* 'Snowdrift', mondo grass (planted in metre-long strips), star jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*), bougainvillea (white), box (*Buxus microphylla*) - used for hedging and spaced at 300mm intervals, 'Skyrocket' juniper.



## Juniper



## Mondo grass



## Hebe



## Camellia sasanqua



## Box

### Cost and availability

We used mature plants to create an instant effect for television. The total cost of plants and materials



was \$6475. Considerable savings are possible using smaller plants (\$4378). Plants are readily available at nurseries. Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, landscape suppliers or garden centres. The vibrating plate compacter and most of the other tools required are available for hire.

**Pond liner and fastening system** - pond kit supplied by Poolsavers, 353 The Horsley Drive, Wetherill Park, NSW. Phone: (02) 9756 1977.

**Reconstituted sandstone pots and benches** are available from most large nurseries and garden ornament specialists. The 'Gothic' design pot and bench we used is produced by Cement Mouldings in Sydney and distributed through the following garden centres:

•  
Parker's Nursery, Turramurra, NSW. Phone: (02) 9487 3888

•  
The Parterre Garden, Woollahra, NSW. Phone: (02) 9363 5874

•  
Michele Shennen Garden Centre, Willoughby, NSW. Phone: (02) 9958 6631

•  
Patio Garden Design, North Sydney, NSW. Phone: (02) 9955 5612

•  
Bay Street Nurseries, Double Bay, NSW. Phone: (02) 9327 3936

•  
Impressions Outdoor Furniture, Heating and Barbeques, Castle Hill, NSW. Phone: (02) 9899 5822.