

BACKYARD BLITZ

Blitz for Kidz



Grant and Lisa Wilkinson have two young children, Rochelle aged 6 and Aaron aged 4. They had just finished rebuilding their house from a rundown, two bedroom brick bungalow to a very stylish four bedroom, double storey home. Grant then started work in the backyard. Unfortunately, he damaged tendons in his pelvis, was hospitalised and could no longer do strenuous work. Grant was bitterly disappointed. He had wanted to create a fun area for his kids to play in. Lisa wrote to the Blitz team in the hope of getting some help. We sent the Wilkinsons away for two days to Lansdowne Park in Goulburn, NSW, for a farm holiday.

Andrew Davies' design is a combination of style and fun. Decorative screens reflect the contemporary elegance of the house. A vibrant entertaining area was created under a black shade sail, complete with metal setting, blue entrance pots and an arrangement of green spheres. The rest of the yard was transformed into a split level kiddies' paradise with a swing set, sand pit, trampoline, swimming pool and bike track.



What we did: We removed builder's rubble and an old garden shed. Then we cleared weeds and excavated to prepare for our works. A sleeper retaining wall was built to provide two level areas in the yard. Decorative screens were mounted on posts and a red concrete bike path was formed up and poured. A shade sail was erected between metal posts. We built a sandpit with sleeper edges and laid the paving. Garden beds were edged, planted and mulched. A level area was created for the pool, which was then assembled and filled. The area was surrounded with an approved pool fence. All play areas were then turfed.



Materials:

Garden edging: 150x25mm treated pine edging, 50x50mm treated pine posts, galvanised nails.

Tools: tape measure, stringline, saw, hammer, sledge hammer.

Retaining wall: 100x100mm treated pine posts, 150x75x2400mm treated pine sleepers, 200x10mm galvanised cup head bolts, quick set concrete. *Tools:* tape measure, stringline, post hole shovel (or Kanga with auger attachment), spade, carpenter's square, saw, spirit level, drill and spanner.

Kids' bike track: 120mm wide strips of 7mm plywood and 50x50mm hardwood pegs for formwork, nails, 100mm expansion jointing, sand for underlay, coloured concrete and trinkets for inlaying (if desired). *Tools:* lump hammer, saw, hammer, spade, wheelbarrow, rake, screed board, wooden float and edging tool.

Paving: Tudor Stone Charcoal 375x375x40mm pavers, road base, paving sand, grouting sand, rapid set concrete. *Tools:* stringline, rubber mallet, spirit level, vibrating plate compactor, brick saw or angle grinder, topsoil leveller, larry hoe or shovel, rake, brickie's trowel, screed, screed rails and wheelbarrow.

Decorative screens: 2400x1200x12mm sheets compressed fibre cement, 100x100mm treated pine posts, rapid set concrete, coach screws and coloured exterior acrylic paints to suit. *Tools:* stringline, tape measure, spirit level, post hole shovel (or Kanga with auger attachment), spade, angle grinder, safety goggles, dust mask or respirator, drill, spanner and saw.

Shade sail: 4.23 triangle landscape sail with adjustable sail webbing belt tensioners, 100x100mm galvanised steel posts and rapid set concrete. *Tools:* Tape measure, spirit level, post hole shovel (or Kanga with auger attachment), spade, angle grinder, safety goggles and drill.

Swimming pool and pool fence: pool, road base, paving sand, approved pool fence and gate. *Tools:* post hole shovel, stringline, tape measure, spirit level, vibrating plate compactor, topsoil leveller, larry hoe or shovel, rake, screed, wheelbarrow and spanners or drivers to suit your pool fence.

Sandpit: treated pine sleepers, agricultural drain, sand, spirit level, galvanised nails or spikes. *Tools:* shovel, spade, wheelbarrow, hammer and lump hammer.

Turf: turf, turf underlay. *Tools:* wheelbarrow, spade, rake, topsoil leveller, hedge shears.

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. Call the 'Dial before you Dig' line on 1100 for information.

Blitz Tipz: Your existing house plans are a great place to start when making your site plan.

Step-by-step

Getting Started: Any rubbish, old structures, paving, weeds, etc should be removed and the site levelled. If your site requires levelling, ensure adequate slope away from the house to prevent flooding in heavy rain. If your soil is of poor quality, it can be mixed 50:50 with a good organic garden mix. If it is high in clay, dig in gypsum or organic clay breaker.

Garden beds

Step 1 We incorporated a layer of around 200mm of organic soil mix into the site soil to about a spade's depth. This was to improve the existing soil structure and add nutrients.

Step 2 Position your plants prior to planting. When you are happy with the layout, plant one at a time, ensuring that plants are placed at the same depth in the soil as they were in their containers.

Step 3 Mulch by spreading a 50mm layer of organic mulch (we used black wood chip) over the garden beds and then water.



Garden edging

Step 1 Set up stringlines to mark out garden edges.

Step 2 Drive in posts along stringline using a sledge hammer. Use saw to cut posts off just below finished edge level.

Step 3 Set up edging in place and nail onto posts. Cut to length where needed, ensuring joins are at posts.

Blitz Tipz: Use a sledge hammer to support the back of the post while nailing the edging on.

Retaining wall

Our retaining wall was constructed with 150x75mm treated pine sleepers on edge bolted to 100x100mm treated pine posts.

Step 1 Excavate along the line of your retaining wall, cutting the soil back to around 300mm from finished wall face.

Step 2 Dig holes for each of your posts to 600mm deep. Space posts so that each sleeper attaches to two posts.

Step 3 Set posts in vertically one at a time using rapid set concrete. Half fill hole with water then pour in concrete, watering as you go and tread into place. Use the stringline and spirit level to ensure each post is vertical. Support post until concrete starts to firm (about 4 mins). Sets in about 15 minutes.

Step 4 Cut off posts just below finished wall height.

Step 5 Position sleepers and bolt onto posts using galvanised cuphead bolts tightened at the back. This ensures there are no rough edges on the face of the wall.

Step 6 Paint wall if desired.



Kids' bike track

Step 1 Level out the ground for the bike path and then use 120x7mm strips of plywood to provide formwork for the edge of the path. (Formwork is the temporary construction used to hold



concrete in shape until it sets.) Ensure sides are parallel and at the same level. Fasten formwork using 50x50mm hardwood pegs driven into the ground. Space pegs at about 400mm.

Step 2 Provide flexible expansion joints around every 2-3 metres. Position plywood on either side of joint to hold in place. These will be removed when concrete is in place.

Step 3 Place about 20mm of paving sand as underlay for the concrete and level.

Step 4 Pour concrete into place. Roughly spread and level concrete using shovel and rake and then screed off using a straight edge.

Step 5 Carefully lift out plywood protecting expansion joints.

Step 6 Provide a rough finish to your path with a wooden float. Work the float in a semi-circular pattern and avoid overworking the concrete. Nice finishes can also be achieved using a stiff brush or broom. Use an edging tool to smooth and round off the path edges.

Step 7 If desired, tap trinkets or features into place along the path. Choose objects with no sharp edges that won't rot or rust.

Step 8 When concrete is firmly set, carefully remove the plywood and pegs (this is called 'striking' the formwork).



Paving

Blitz Tipz: We used Tudor Stone Charcoal 375x375x40mm pavers. They cost around \$52 per square metre and are available from Texi-Pave Sales Pty Ltd, Sydney, phone (02) 4774 0555.

Step 1 Clear the area to be paved and excavate if required. The excavation depth is calculated as the thickness of the paver (in this case 40mm) plus around 30mm for paving sand, plus 75mm for road base for pedestrian areas. [Note: Use 100mm road base over clays.] As our site soil was wet and mobile, we used 150mm of road base stabilised with cement to ensure our paving would be stable. If you are in doubt about how much road base to use, seek advice from your local landscape professionals.



Step 2 Mark out area to be paved. Lay road base to about 100mm deep. Compact to approximately 75mm with a vibrating plate compactor.

Step 3 Bring in paving sand and tread into place about 30mm deep. Set up screed rails to 40mm below finished paving level. Screed off paving sand to even surface.

Step 4 Start laying the pavers along the longest straight edge of the area to be paved using a string line to keep them in position. If any of the pavers need to be cut, use a brick saw or angle grinder.

Blitz Tipz: A brick saw can be hired for about \$130 a day.

Step 5 Excavate a 100mm trench around the outside edge of the paved area (unless up against a solid structure) and fill with concrete (follow instructions on bag). Use a brickie's trowel to compact concrete against the side of the pavers taking care not to mound it too high and spoil the look of the paving. Allow to set. This retains the paving sand in place.

Step 6 Sprinkle grouting sand (fine sand) over the paving and sweep to fill the gaps. This sand stabilises the paving by wedging pavers in place.

Blitz Tipz: Grouting sand flows best when completely dry so sprinkle a layer over the paving and allow to dry before sweeping in.

Decorative screens

Step 1 Plan where your screens will be and mark out post locations. Dig post holes to 600mm using shovel or auger.

Step 2 Set posts in vertically one at a time using rapid set concrete. Half fill hole with water then pour in concrete, watering as you go and tread into place. Use a spirit level and stringline to ensure each post is vertical in both directions. Support post until concrete starts to firm (about 4 mins). Sets in about 15 minutes.

Step 3 Cut compressed fibre cement to desired shape using an angle grinder with a masonry blade. **Blitz Tipz:** Compressed fibre cement is made from cellulose (from wood chip) sand and cement. It produces a very fine dust when cut that is potentially hazardous if inhaled. Therefore we recommend using a cartridge respirator when cutting this product.

Step 4 Hold screens up against posts, mark and then pre-drill holes for coach screws. Get help as these sheets are quite heavy.

Step 5 Screw screens into place.

Step 6 Have fun painting your screens with colourful exterior acrylic paints. Choose your colours with regard to the existing colours in your yard and on surrounding structures.



Shade sail

Step 1 Locate posts and dig holes to around 1 metre deep using shovel or auger. We used 100x100mm galvanised, square-section, steel posts which we set out in a triangle. Your shade sail supplier will be able to advise you on spacing and fastening.

Step 2 Set posts in vertically one at a time using rapid set concrete. Half fill hole with water then pour in concrete, watering as you go and tread into place. Use a spirit level to ensure each post is vertical in both directions. Support post until concrete starts to firm (about 4 mins). Sets in about 15 minutes.

Step 3 Leave posts overnight then attach and tension your shade sail according to manufacturer's instructions.

Swimming pool and pool fence

Step 1 Level area where pool is to be located. Diameter of area will depend on the pool you buy.

Step 2 Bring in 75mm road base and compact using a vibrating plate compactor.

Step 3 Place about 20mm of sand on the road base and screed level.

Step 4 Assemble pool according to manufacturer's instructions. Install in place and fill with water.

Step 5 Install your pool fence and gate. Pool fences are sold as panels posts and gates. Strict safety regulations govern pool fences, so check with your supplier and install in strict accordance with instructions provided.

Sandpit

Step 1 Excavate area to about 200mm below finished sand level. (As our site soil was clayey, we sloped our excavation down to 400mm along the centre. We then installed an agricultural drain to remove soil water from the sand pit.)



Step 2 Where sleeper edges are required for the sand pit: lay sleepers on edge, check they are level and fasten together using galvanised nails or spikes. If they are raised well above ground level, use 50x50mm pegs to help secure them.

Step 3 Fill pit with sand.

Turf

Blitz Tip: In some areas subsurface drainage may be required prior to turfing. If in doubt, check with your local landscape professionals.

Step 1 Prepare the area for turf by removing all debris and levelling. If your soil is poor, spread a layer of a good quality turf underlay soil mix and level with a topsoil leveller.

Blitz Tip: Turf underlay soil is spread about 100mm (4") thick and costs around \$34 a cubic metre.

Step 2 Roll out the turf starting along the longest straight edge and cutting to shape with hedge shears or spade where required. Roll with a lawn roller and then water well.

Our plants

Braided standard fig (*Ficus benjamina* 'Emerald'), brush cherry or lilly pilly (*Syzygium australe* sold as *S. paniculatum*), vitex (*Vitex trifolia* 'Purpurea'), dwarf variegated agapanthus (*Agapanthus* 'Tinkerbell'), variegated pittosporum (*Pittosporum eugenioides* 'Variegatum'), triangle palm (*Neodypsis decaryi*). Turf: kikuyu.



variegated pittosporum



triangle palm



vitex



kikuyu



Cost and availability

We used mature plants in our makeover to create an instant effect for television. Our total cost of plants and materials was \$14,293. Considerable savings are possible using smaller plants, reducing the total cost to \$8,540.

- Tudor Stone Charcoal pavers cost around \$52 per square metre and are available from Texi-Pave Sales Pty Ltd, Sydney, phone (02) 4774 0555.
- 4.23 triangle landscape sail with adjustable sail webbing belt tensioners from Moodie Marketing Australia, phone (02) 9816 1133. Comes in four standard colours: wheat; heritage green; terracotta and gum grey. These retail for around \$240. Our black sail was a special order retailing around \$490.
- GF17 650mm Grey Finish cement pots cost \$121 each from L + M Winter Concrete Products, Sydney, phone (02) 9905 9197.
- Harbour table and chair setting (\$606), green spheres (\$127 for 3) and blue entrance pots (\$229 each) all came from Decorator Terracotta Pty Ltd, Sydney, phone (02) 9450 1944.
- Kikuyu turf is available from turf suppliers in many areas of Australia for around \$2.20 per square metre. Check with your local turf growers for the suitability of kikuyu as lawn in your area.
- Most of the selected plants are readily available at nurseries or ask your nursery to order them for you.
- Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, building suppliers, or landscape suppliers.
- All tools used are commonly available for hire.

Acknowledgments: Design by Andrew Davies, ICON Exteriors, phone: (02) 9876 4632. Construction by the Backyard Blitz team.