

BACKYARD BLITZ

Tropical Toddlers

Sascha Kennedy is a single mum with a baby and a toddler. The last thing she had time or money for was to fix up her backyard - but it certainly needed an overhaul to make it safe and attractive for the kids to play in. The Blitz Team decided to give her a helping hand. In a couple of days they created a lush tropical paradise with plenty of space for the kids to play. And so it would be a big surprise Sascha, her mum and the kids were sent away for few days while the makeover took place.



[Click to view plan](#)



Landscape Designer Colin Brown drew up a plan which included a paved area for a table, chairs and large shade umbrella; a sandpit; a paddling pool with fountain; and a large garden area densely planted to give a tropical look.

What we did

Removed some of the existing turf to create new garden beds. One wall was concealed with a wire climbing frame for climbing plants and an ornamental wall fountain added. Below the fountain was a play area for the children with a wading pool and sandpit. Part of the garden was paved to provide outdoor seating space.

Materials

Garden edging: treated pine garden edging (100mm) and pegs (300mm), galvanised nails. *Tools:* string line and spray marker.

Paving: Carpet Stone pavers, river sand, crusher dust, treated pine edging (100mm) and pegs (300mm), galvanised nails. *Tools:* topsoil leveller.

Pond and sandpit: half circle fibreglass pond liners, pond capping, polytube fittings and ag. pipe for drain, Sikaflex 11FC, Rapidset concrete, river sand, blue metal. *Tools:* caulking gun, shovel.

Fountain: wall mask fountain head, low voltage pond pump and transformer, low voltage cable, polycrete pit (300mm x 300mm), gel cap cable joiners, flex copper pipe. *Tools:* spade, wire cutters.

Garden beds: plants (see list below), leaf litter mulch.

Wall frame: reinforcing mesh, wall mounting clips, rawl plugs. *Tools:* bolt cutters, drill, screwdriver.

Other tools: turf cutter (hired).

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.

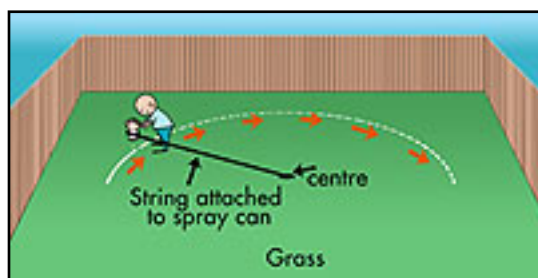
Note: On your plan show the locations of any services (water pipes, sewerage, power, phone, etc) so you can avoid damaging them during the makeover.

Step-by-step

Getting started: Any rubbish, old structures, paving, weeds, etc should be removed and the site levelled.

Garden beds and edges: Treated pine edging was used to define the garden beds and to stop grass growing into the beds. The edges were designed as a series of arcs giving a smooth but irregular effect.

Step 1 Drive a peg into the centre point of the first arc you wish to mark out. Tie a string line to the peg and measure out the distance to the arc. Tie a spray marker can at this point and mark out the arc on the ground. Continue to mark out the other arcs.



Step 2 Dig out the edges of the garden bed with a spade following the paint line. Remove any grass or unwanted plants from the garden bed and dig or rotary hoe it.

Blitz Tipz: A turf cutter can be hired to remove large areas of lawn.

Step 3 Place the treated pine garden edging along the edge of the garden. Drive treated pine pegs at 1m intervals and nail the edging in place.

Step 4 Plant the garden keeping plants at the same depth as they were in



their containers. Spread a 50mm layer of mulch over the entire garden and water thoroughly.

Blitz Tipz: A good quality organic garden mix should be added in a 50:50 mix where original soil is of poor quality or insufficient remains after removal of existing plants.

Paving: Part of the backyard was paved with concrete cobblestones. We used Carpet Stone pavers, which come in ready-to-lay strips and are quick and easy. The 'stones' have a nylon mesh base which can be easily cut to shape. Crusher dust was swept between the stones as a grout.

Step 1 Level the area and if necessary use a vibrating plate to compact the ground until it is solid. Use treated pine edging and pegs to edge the area to be paved. (See 'Garden beds and edges' above for edging procedure.)



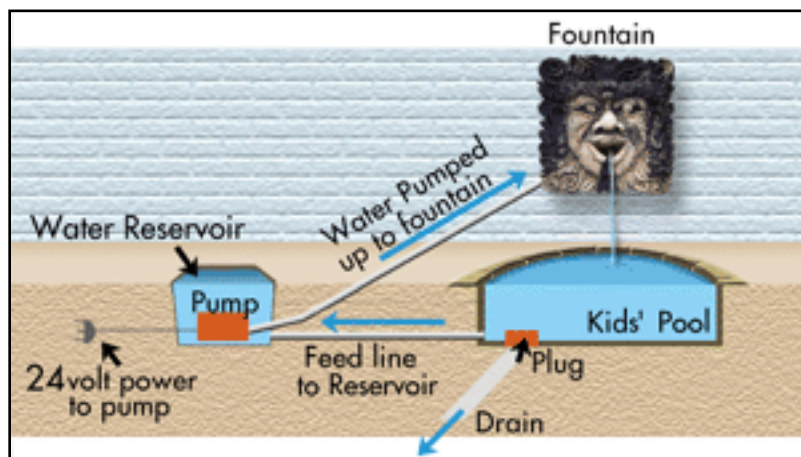
Step 2 Spread a 50mm layer of river sand over the entire area and make it level using a topsoil leveller or rake.

Step 3 Lay pavers then broom crusher dust into the gaps between the stones.

Paddling pool and sandpit. A dual purpose play area featuring a sunken sandpit and a paddling pool was made. A fountain played into the paddling pool from the wall above.

Blitz Tipz: Two half-round pond liners sunk into the ground were used but a cheaper clamshell-style is a quick and easy alternative. They cost around \$18 from chain-stores.

The fountain pump was placed in a separate cistern so it wouldn't get in the way of the children playing. The tank was adjacent to the paddling pool with a pipe connecting the two. For ease of emptying the pool and to provide drainage for the sandpit, an underground drain was dug, lined with blue metal and ag. pipe and connected into the nearest drainage system.



Step 1 Mark out the area to be excavated (paddling pool, sandpit, fountain cistern, drainage line, power cable and fountain feed) and dig them out to the depth of the pool/sandpit liners plus an

additional 50mm for the sand base. The drain line should have a gentle slope away from the pool to the main drain. Excavate an extra 50mm to allow for the blue metal footing.

Step 2 Cement a drainage connector onto the bottom of the pool in the corner closest to the drainage line using Sikaflex 11FC and allow to set overnight. In the same corner 50mm above the bottom of the pool cement the connector for the fountain cistern. Cut a hole in the base of sandpit the same diameter as the ag line.

Step 3 Place 50mm of river sand in the bottom of the pool/sandpit hole and level - creating a *very* slight gradient towards the drainage corner. Place the pool and sandpit into position and test gradient by pouring a cup of water into each.

Step 4 Place 50mm of blue metal in the drainage channel. Cut back the ag. line to allow the geotextile sock to be securely tied off around the opening. This prevents sand from entering the drain. Push it through the hole in the sandpit (150mm), connect the pond drain to the ag. line with a 'T' connector.

Step 5 Lay the ag. line in place, cover with more blue metal to a depth of 150mm, and fill the channel in with topsoil. Finally connect it into the drainage system.

Step 6 Connect the feed pipe then mount the fountain head on the wall above the pond at a height of 1.5m.

Step 7 Locate the fountain cistern on top of a 50mm river sand base and connect to the pond. Put the pump in position and connect the fountain feed hose and the low voltage cable. Bury the hose and cable with topsoil. Connect the other end of the cable to the transformer.

Blitz Tipz: Note location of all new cables, drains and pipes to avoid damage when excavating in the future.

Step 8 Put the lid on the cistern and fill in the area around the cistern with topsoil. Ensure there is an air hole in the top of the cistern.

Step 9 Dig a 100mm trench around the edge of the pool/sandpit and fill with mortar. Put the pool/sandpit capping in place and allow the mortar to set.

Step 10 Fill the sandpit with sand and the pool with water. Test the fountain. *Blitz Tipz:* Ask for 'sandpit sand' at your nursery or landscape supplier for a coarse, sticky sand that kids like to play in.

Wall frame. A low gauge reinforcing mesh (reo) frame was placed on a wall to allow climbing plants to grow over it.

Step 1 Cut the reo to shape using bolt cutters and put into position using timber stays to support it.

Step 2 Drill holes into the wall for the mounting clips, screw the clips into position using screws with rawl plugs.

Blitz Tipz: We painted the wall under the frame with Watty! Storm Cloud for a dramatic look.



Our plants:

Climber: pandorea (*Pandorea jasminoides*)

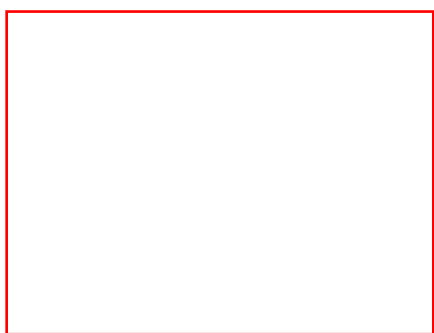
Shrubs and palms: vireya rhododendron, lilly pillies (*Syzygium australe*), bangalow palms (*Archontophoenix cunninghamiana*), bromeliads, indigofera

Ferns and grasses: tree ferns (*Cyathea* and *Dicksonia*), *Blechnum*, staghorn fern, bird's nest fern (*Asplenium australasicum*), tassel bush (*Restio*)

Ground cover: native violet (*Viola hederacea*), *Hardenbergia violacea*



bangalow palm



bird's nest fern



bromeliad



staghorn fern



native violet



**vireya
rhododendron**

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 \$9551. Savings are possible using small plants and a clamshell wading pool (\$5000). Plants are readily available at nurseries. Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, landscape suppliers or garden centres. The pond liner and coping came from a specialist pond supplier (El Rancho Garden Products, phone: (02) 9809 2265). For your nearest distributor of Carpet Stone contact Daisho (Aust) Pty Ltd, phone: (02) 9267 3362. The vibrating plate compactor and other tools are available for hire.

For the **Revisiting Old Friends** fact sheet [click here](#).