

BACKYARD BLITZ

Chequerboard Garden

The Schulman family (Robert, Hazel and sons Craig, Russell and Jason) enjoy the great outdoors but they're not great gardeners. Their backyard was a bit of a mess but it had plenty of potential. The Blitz team decided to take on the challenge to transform the backyard as a surprise for Hazel. While Robert took Hazel on an impromptu holiday the boys stayed home and pitched in to help with the work.



Landscape Designer Colin Brown's plan was for a bold modern garden with a pergola over a black and white chequerboard paved entertainment area. The black and white theme continued into the plantings. Golden highlights were provided by a gold dome for the pergola (formerly the roof of a telephone box!) and six big golden candle garden lights.



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What we did

We cleared the entire site and removed the turf. The garden beds and paved areas were marked out, road base laid as a sub base for the paving, the lawn borders, entertainment area and area around the back door was paved. The candle holders were painted and cemented into position, the pergola was built, garden beds and borders planted and the turf laid.



Materials

Pergola: posts (125x125mm), roof beams (150x38mm), Rapid Set concrete (40kg bags), bolts, nuts (150mm) and nails all galvanised. *Tools:* circular saw, nail gun, post hole shovel, length of clear hose.

Paving: concrete pavers (335x335x50mm in black and white), paving sand, cement, road base.

Tools: vibrating plate, screed, spirit level, brickie's trowel, brick saw or angle grinder, string line, measuring tape, ruler, marker pen.

Candles: galvanised pipe (1.5m high x 150mm diameter), Rapid Set concrete (40kg bags), paint, black Japan stain, candles (150mm diameter). *Tools:* paint brush.

Garden beds: plants (see list below), composted pinebark fines mulch.

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. If you wish to include a featured pattern in the paving detail its dimensions carefully.

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

Step-by-step

Getting started

Any rubbish, old structures, paving, weeds, etc should be removed and the site levelled. When 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 (following instructions on the bag) or organic clay breaker in a 50:50 ratio.

Entertainment area

We created an entertainment area with a pergola and black and white paving. The pergola included custom-made canvas panels to provide shade and a gold dome.

Step 1 Clear the area to be paved and excavate to provide a bed for the pavers. Excavation depth is the thickness of the paver (in this case 50mm) plus 50mm for paving sand plus 100mm for road base.

Step 2 Half house out the timber beams for the pergola roof, then assemble the roof.

Step 3 To find the location of the pergola support posts lay the assembled pergola roof on the ground reflecting its 'final' position. Mark out the position of the support posts using spray marker paint, remove the roof assembly and excavate the holes to a depth of 600mm (see photo).



Step 4 To make a solid pad to sit the post on, pour some Rapid Set concrete into the holes, watering and mixing it into a slurry as you go. Allow to set for at least 15 minutes. (**Note:** we used only the equivalent of about 4 cups of concrete per hole.)

Lay the pergola roof on the ground to precisely mark out position of the poles. The house outs allow the beams to be flush.

Step 5 Place one of the support posts in the hole and mark the height you want the pergola roof to be (in our case 2.3m). Remove the post and using a saw house out the top to accommodate the roof (see photo).



Step 6 Place the post back in the hole. Use a spirit level to ensure the post is exactly vertical. Half fill the hole with water then tip in a bag of Rapid Set concrete, watering as you go. The concrete should be filled to the top of the hole. Hold the post in position while the concrete starts to set (about 4 minutes) This post will become the guide post.

Once the poles are cemented in position assemble the pergola roof.

Step 7 Place the other posts in their holes and use a water level to find a point at the same height on each post and level with the house out in the guide post. To do this take a length of clear hose filled with water and, with the assistance of a helper, hold one end of the hose against the guide post and the other against the next post. Water naturally finds its own level so the level of the water in the hose is the same at both ends when they are at the same height. Adjust the hose on the guide post so the water level lines up with the house out and mark the same point on the other post. Repeat this process for each post. Remove the posts and house them out.

Blitz Tipz: Any clear flexible hose can be used to find the levels.

Step 8 Return each post to its original hole and concrete them into position. Check the poles are

vertical by using a spirit level. Allow the concrete to set before continuing.

Blitz Tipz: Try not to disturb fresh concrete until it has cured. Rapid Set is best left overnight but with care you can start working around it within 3 hours. Do not start the compacting of the paving sub base until the concrete has cured overnight.

Step 9 Attach the pergola roof by bolting the beams to the support posts (see pic above). Tidy up the ends of the posts and beams with a saw.

Blitz Tipz: Unless you have the assistance of several helpers you may find it easier to dis-assemble the roof and rebuild it in place.

Step 10 Lay 130mm of road base into the excavated area under the pergola and lightly sprinkle with water. Compact to 100mm with a vibrating plate.

Step 11 Lay 50mm of paving sand over the road base, level with a topsoil leveller and compact. Screed the sand in a sawing motion ensuring it is at the right level and slope.

Blitz Tipz: It can be difficult keeping large areas of paving level. Care must be taken when screeding the paving sand. Use guide rails to get it right. We used 40mm wide aluminium strips about 4mm thick and 4m long. To set up for the screeding first screed a narrow strip down one side, finding the right slope and level with the help of a spirit level then lay a screeding rail along this strip. Repeat the process on the opposite side. Now that you have the two outside strips correct, lay the screed across the rails and screed the sand in between. Screeds of varying widths are available from builder's supply shops or hardware stores.



Nigel has a wide aluminium screed which he is using to level the sand before laying the pavers.

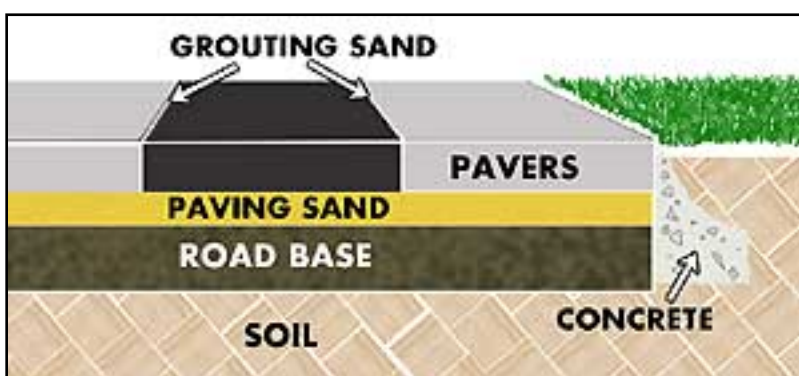
Step 12 Start laying the pavers along the longest straight edge of the area to be paved using a string line to keep them in position. Some of the pavers will need to be cut to accommodate the pergola support posts - use a brick saw or angle grinder. As the white tiles could become discoloured we sealed these tiles before they were laid. Scrub the pavers well with detergent and water to remove any oily residue. Paint on an all purpose sealant.

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



Step 13 Complete the paving creating a pattern if desired. We used a chequerboard pattern.

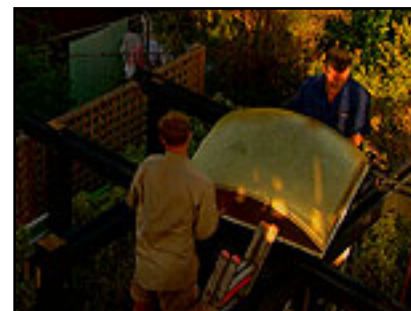
Step 14 Excavate a 100mm trench around the outside edge of the paved area (unless up against a solid structure) and fill with concrete (mix as per instructions on the bag). Use a brickie's trowel to compact concrete against the side of the pavers taking care not to mound it too high and spoil the look of the paving, allow to set (see diagram below).



Step 15 Sprinkle grouting sand (fine sand) over the paving and sweep to fill the gaps.

Blitz Tipz: Grouting sand flows best when completely dry so lightly sprinkle a layer over the paving and allow to bake in the sun for a couple of hours before sweeping in.

Step 16 Drop the pergola dome into position and attach the canvas shade panels.



Garden borders

Black concrete pavers were used to border the garden. They separated the garden beds from the lawn.

Step 1 Mark out the position of the border using spray marker paint, excavate a bed for the pavers to a depth of the thickness of the paver plus 50mm for the paving sand base.

Step 2 Fill the trench with paving sand and compact to a final depth of 50mm and level with a screed.

Step 3 Excavate a 100mm trench along the outer edge of the paving sand sub base and fill with concrete.

Blitz Tipz: Prepare a concrete mix in a wheelbarrow by simply stirring in water as per the manufacturers instructions.

Step 4 Lay the pavers on the paving sand bed using string lines to find their position. Use a brickie's trowel to mound concrete up the sides of the pavers to keep them in position, taking care not to mound it too high and spoil the look of the paving. Allow the concrete to set overnight before

resuming work in the area

Candles

We used giant gold candles (150mm diameter) for garden lighting. The candle holders were made out of lengths of 150mm galvanised pipe which were painted gold (see photo).

Step 1 Mark out the position for the candle holders and excavate a hole to 600mm. Place the holders in position and use a spirit level to ensure the holder is exactly vertical. Half fill the hole with water then add Rapid Set concrete, watering as you go. The concrete should be filled to the top of the hole. Hold the holder in position while the concrete starts to set (about 4 minutes). Complete this procedure for each.



Step 2 Paint the holders. We painted them gold and then used a procedure called ragging to tone the gold down a little. Black Japan was applied over the gold finish with a rag to give an antique gold effect.

Step 3 Fill each holder with sand so the top of the candle is flush with the top of each holder. Fit a candle in each holder.

Garden beds

Our garden beds were at the same level as the paving. Plant the garden keeping plants at the same depth as they were in their containers. Spread a 50mm layer of mulch (we used composted pinebark fines) over the entire garden and water thoroughly.

Our plants: variegated pittosporum (*Pittosporum eugenioides* 'Variegatum'), dwarf pittosporum (*Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Irene Paterson'), goldfussia (*Strobilanthes anisophyllus*). Turf: kikuyu.



**variegated
pittosporum**



**dwarf
pittosporum**



goldfussia



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 \$9062. Considerable savings are possible using smaller plants (\$5125). Plants are readily available at nurseries, turf is available from turf suppliers. Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, landscape suppliers or garden centres. The shade panels used in the pergola were made by Advantage Sails, phone (02) 9555 9000. The black and white concrete pavers were made to order from Besser Block Centre (phone (02) 9982 2536). The phone box roof came from Thunderbird Constructions (phone (02) 9571 8299). The vibrating plate compacter, post hole shovel, brick cutter and most of the other tools required are available for hire.