

BACKYARD BLITZ

Birthday Surprise

Alain and Ariane Aubeelaus own a beautifully renovated inner city cottage with a disaster of a backyard. Alain had watched 'Backyard Blitz' on Channel 9 and wondered why things like that never happened to him - surprise Alain you're next! Ariane and five year-old daughter Ashley had been working secretly with the Blitz team for weeks planning the makeover. While Ariane took Alain away for two days for his birthday, Ashley stayed home to help get his surprise ready - a surprise makeover and a surprise birthday!



[Click to view plan](#)

Landscape designer John Happ's plan was to add an outdoor room to the period cottage. A conifer hedge forms the walls with a dwarf pittosporum border below and camellias were planted next to the house for colour. Paving surrounds a beautiful soft lawn and seven classic planters feature cycads. A new picket fence at the rear separates the outdoor room from the utility area behind.

What we did

We removed a palm and ground out the stump, excavated soil, removed some concrete and repaired and painted the paling fence. A new picket fence was built, paving and lawn laid, sandstone urns and pedestals were brought in and the garden areas planted.

Blitz Tip: If you wish to remove trees permission may be required from your local council. Always have the work done by a qualified arborist (costing around \$200 per hour). Stumps can be ground out completely with a stump grinder.



Materials

Picket fence and gate: posts (90x90mm), rails (70x45mm), pickets (42x19mm), paint (exterior low sheen acrylic Dulux Pipe Grey), Rapid Set concrete (40kg bags). Gate made to order by a joiner, 2 hinges, latch, bolts and nuts (150mm) and picket nails all galvanised. *Tools:* auger or shovel, circular saw, spirit level, nail gun, electric screwdriver, clear hose.

Paving: Urbanstone quarry style pavers (colours: Salmon Back and New Yorker; size: 400x400x40mm), paving sand, road base, grouting sand, concrete (40kg bag). *Tools:* vibrating plate compactor, brickie's trowel, brick saw, rubber mallet, string line, measuring tape, ruler, marker pen.

Garden beds and containers: reconstituted sandstone pedestals and urns, plants (see list below), potting mix, horticultural pine bark for garden mulch, Riverina red pebbles for surface of containers.

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

Step-by-step

Getting started

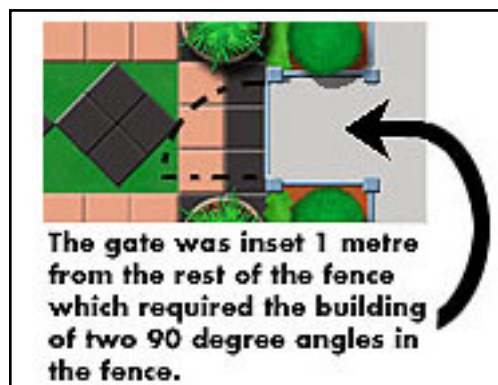
Any rubbish, old structures, paving, weeds, etc should be removed and the site levelled. When levelling ensure adequate slope away from the house to prevent flooding in heavy rain. If your soil is of poor quality it can be mixed 50:50 with a good organic garden mix from a nursery or landscape suppliers.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

Picket fence

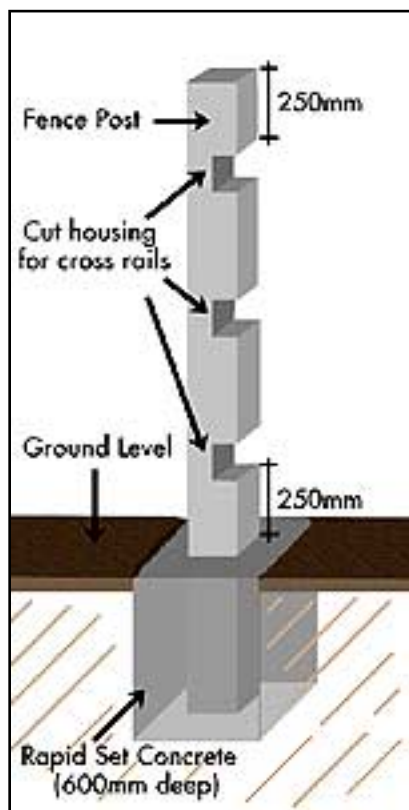
We built a picket fence and gate to screen off the utility area at the back of the garden.

Step 1 Paint the posts, cross rails and pickets.

Step 2 Mark out the position of the fence posts and use an auger or shovel to dig post holes 600mm deep. To make a solid pad to sit the posts on pour some Rapid Set concrete into the holes, watering and mixing 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.)



Step 3 Place one of the end posts in the hole and measure up 250mm from ground level, 250mm down from the top and the point half way in between. Remove the post and using a chisel and saw cut out three notches at the points marked to house the cross rails, called a half house out (see diagram below).



Step 4 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.

Step 5 Place all of the other posts in their holes and use a water level to find the points at the same height on each post and level with the house outs on 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. Adjust the hose on the guide post so the water level lines up with one of the house outs and mark the same point on the other post. Mark each house out point on each of the posts. Remove the posts and house them out.

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

Step 6 Return each post to its original hole and concrete them into position using a string line just above ground level to keep them in line and a spirit level to ensure they are vertical. 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.

Blitz Tipz: A nail gun can be hired for around \$100 per day and makes quick work of building picket fences.



Step 7 Bolt the cross rails to the posts (use an angle grinder to cut the bolt off flush with the nut) and 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 five 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 8 Putty the nail holes in the fence pickets and touch up the paint work.

Note: If your fence design is the same as ours you will need to double house out the posts on the right angle corners (see picture left).

The gate

We had a gate made to order by a joiner which we finished with the addition of a solid plywood back. A picket gate can be built using the procedure outlined in our Classic Courtyard makeover, see picket fence steps 7-12.



Paving and lawn

We created a lawn area with a paved border and stepping stones running through the centre. Two colours of paver were used. Urns on pedestals were positioned at the corners as highlights (see photo).

Step 1 Clear the area for the paving and lawn. Mark out the position of the pavers using spray marker paint. The lawn and the pavers should be the same height when completed so calculate the depth required for the paving sub base and excavate.

Note: To make the calculation consideration needs to be given to the thickness of the paver and sub base (in our case 40mm pavers, 50mm of sand and 100mm of road base) and the thickness of the turf (approximately 60mm for the buffalo we used).

Blitz Tipz: If you are paving on very hard ground the depth of the road base can be reduced to around 75mm (compacted) with around 30mm of paving sand on top.

Step 2 Lay road base (for 100mm final depth lay approximately 130mm uncompacted) and lightly sprinkle with water. Compact to 100mm with a vibrating plate.

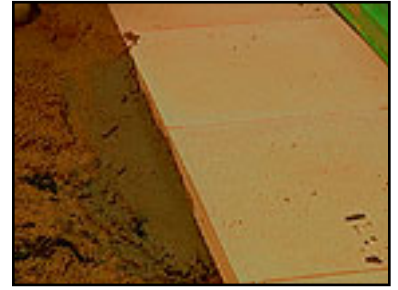
Step 3 Lay approximately 50mm of paving sand over the compacted road base and level with a topsoil leveller. Use a screed or dead straight length of timber to ensure a smooth level finish to pave on.

Step 4 Set up a string line and use it to guide the laying of the pavers. Tamp each paver into place with a rubber mallet keeping it tight against the other pavers. Complete the paved border. Some pavers may need to be cut with brick saw or angle grinder to accommodate existing fixtures on your property.

Blitz Tipz: A very solid paving finish can be achieved by compacting your paving with a vibrating plate fitted with a piece of carpet to protect the pavers. **CAUTION:** not all types of paver can withstand this - it is essential to check the manufacturer's recommendations first.



Step 5 Excavate a 100mm trench around the outside edge of the paved area to make a mortar haunch (which will prevent the pavers from moving). Fill with a mortar mix as per the instructions on the bag. Use a brickie's trowel to compact the mortar 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 step is not necessary if the paving is flush with a solid edge like a wall.



Step 6 Sprinkle grouting sand (fine sand) over the paving and sweep to fill the gaps.

Blitz Tip: 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 7 To begin the stepping stones mark out their position using spray marker paint. Excavate a shallow bed for each giving consideration to the thickness of the paver (and its sub base of around 50mm) and the final height of the turf.

Step 8 A sub base for the paver can be made by mixing sand and cement in a 4:1 ratio. Lay the sub base in the bed (to a depth of 50mm) and level, very lightly sprinkle with water. Lay the paver into position and tamp down with a rubber mallet, check with a spirit level. Continue this procedure until all of the stepping stone pavers are laid.

Step 9 Lightly sprinkle water over the stepping stones again taking care not to erode the footings. Allow the mortar to set for three days before walking on them.

Step 10 Lay out the turf, cutting to shape with hedge shears, roll and water.



Note: for improved drainage a pit was dug into the lawn and connected to the storm water drain (see diagram). An off-the-shelf PVC sump with a grate was used which is available from most hardware stores and is easy to install.

Finishing touches We positioned reconstituted sandstone urns on pedestals on the corners of our paving border. The urns were planted out with cycads and mulched with Riverina red pebbles for a dramatic effect.

Garden beds Plant the garden keeping plants at the same depth as they were in their containers. Mulch with a 50mm layer of organic mulch (eg composted horticultural pine bark) over the entire garden and water thoroughly.



Our plants: Bhutan cypress (*Cupressus torulosa*), camellia (*Camellia sasanqua* 'Paradise Vanessa'), Japanese pittosporum (*Pittosporum tobira* 'Miss Muffett'), sago palm or cycad (*Cycas revoluta*). Turf: soft buffalo (variety 'Palmetto').



Camellia sasanqua



Cupressus torulosa



Cycad



Pittosporum 'Miss Muffett'



Soft Buffalo - 'Palmetto'

Cost and availability

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

was \$10,587. Savings are possible using smaller plants (\$7217).

Plants and turf: Plants are readily available at nurseries or can be ordered in. The buffalo turf variety we used ('Palmetto') is from Abulk, Clarendon, NSW. It is available from major turf suppliers in most areas. Phone (02) 4577 5912 for your nearest stockist.

Pavers and urns: Pavers were from Urbanstone. For local availability phone (02) 9630 3277 (or see their website: www.urbanstone.com.au). The pedestal and urn were from Elegant Garden World, phone (02) 9723 1088.

Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, landscape suppliers or garden centres. The vibrating plate compactor and most of the other tools required are available for hire.

Acknowledgements

Design by John Happ, 3rd Dimension Designs, phone (02) 9744 2658. Construction by the Blitz team.

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