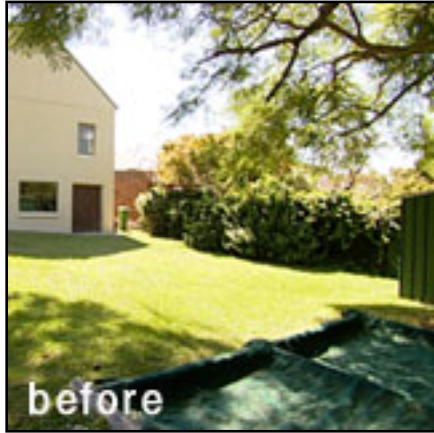


BACKYARD BLITZ

Mighty Tots



When Cathie Morton moved from Adelaide to Sydney with her husband Jeff and their four children five years ago, she became a mum on a mission. Cathie was keen to fit into her new neighbourhood, so she started an informal mothers' group at the local church hall. Now the hall is a weekly meeting place for up to 90 mums and 100 children, and is an essential support network for the community's parents. So Jo Manning, a local mum and regular visitor to the hall, invited the Backyard Blitz team to improve the children's play area as a way of thanking Cathie for her inspirational community spirit.

Landscape designer Andrew Davies from ICON Exteriors has returned to his childhood for inspiration in creating a colourful playground in this previously bland grassed space. Fantasy abounds in the garden with a new castle-inspired entrance leading to a central bike track and sunken sandpit. Checkerboard paving supports an open-plan cubby and allows for supervised play. Informal stepping stones lead to an intimate play space complete with a letterbox in which children can leave messages for Santa and the tooth fairy. This garden has elements for all ages that can be easily translated to your backyard.



Adapting this plan to your garden

Make a detailed scale drawing of your backyard (e.g. 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: public playgrounds are required to comply with relevant Australian Standards. Discuss your proposal with a professional designer if you have any concerns about safety or compliance.

Getting started

The large space allowed for site stripping by a bobcat. Proposed structures, garden beds and paving were marked out with spray paint. Excavation for paving and pouring of concrete was carried out and an organic soil mix was incorporated into the new garden beds.

Materials

Paving: Nigel created a checkerboard paved area by combining two different coloured pavers (400x400mm, Stepstone 'Charcoal' and 'Oatmeal'). A 100mm thick layer of compacted roadbase provided a solid sub-base for the area. Coarse washed river sand levelled to provide adequate fall away from the hall was used to act as a bedding layer for the large pavers. Fine grouting sand (Sydney sand) was swept between the pavers to bond them together, while a mortar haunch around the perimeter locked the whole area in place. **Blitz Tipz:** Lay pavers about 7mm above established finishing heights to allow for final compacting of pavers once laid.



Timber screens and cubby: Scott erected some simple fantasy rooms for the children to play in. Treated pine posts (H4, 90x90mm) installed in-ground in concrete support a light timber frame (70x35mm). Marine ply (9mm) connected to the frame with hex-head galvanised screws creates private, child-size play spaces. Flowers, smiling faces and colourful creatures painted onto the sheeting enliven the garden and provide inspiration for young imaginations. Boundary screens were erected using the same construction techniques, with timber lattice infills substituted for marine ply..



Blitz Tipz: Construct cubby houses and play equipment on a scale appropriate for small bodies and ensure that screws and bolts are countersunk to minimise injury

Castle entrance: large diameter pine posts (H4, 125mm) installed inground in concrete support timber beams (100x50mm), a ridge cap (70x35mm) and marine ply in a triangular shape to give the appearance of a pitched roof. All timber members were nailed and bolted with stainless steel fasteners and marine ply was screwed into place. Double gates hung from galvanised drop hinges and constructed with treated pine (70x35mm and 50x50mm) produced a stylish entrance to the garden.

Blitz Tipz: Build double gates in one section and cut them in half when they are ready to be hung.

Fencing: Jamie installed a new paling fence to replace the ivy-smothered fence, which was removed. Posts (H4, 120x50mm) set in-ground in concrete house rails (70x35mm) with mitred ends nailed in place. Palings nailed vertically onto rails are spaced 3mm apart to allow for the swelling and shrinkage of timber. An existing galvanised steel fence was relocated so that the shape of the garden could be improved with a curved front fence line. **Blitz Tipz:** Use a string line along the finished height of your fence to guide you when connecting the palings. Paling fences are rarely absolutely level but look best when the tops are straight.



Concrete path: Concreting is a simple job but needs excellent preparation for best results. Scott directed the bobcat to produce base levels and installed a curved formwork using hardwood pegs (450x50x50mm) and strips of formwork ply (100mm wide). Pre-mixed concrete (20 Mpa) with a beige oxide was delivered and poured in place directly from the truck. A textured finish was achieved by brushing lightly with a soft bristled broom as the concrete went off (set). Expansion joints were placed at 2m intervals to absorb movement beneath and reduce the likelihood of the concrete cracking. An edging tool smoothed off edges to prevent crumbling. **Blitz Tipz:** Concrete is ordered in cubic metres in increments of 0.2 cubic metres. Always order 10% more than your estimate to allow for variations in thickness and wastage when laying.



Sandpit: a kidney shaped sandpit located within the concrete bike track enables scattered sand to be swept back in at the end of play. Scott's concrete formwork defines the freeform shape which was excavated to a depth of 300mm. For rainwater to escape, a drainage channel was built underneath the concrete path heading downhill to the adjacent garden bed. It houses an agricultural pipe (100mm) covered in blue metal (20mm). The base of the sandpit is filled with a 100mm layer of blue metal and covered with geotextile fabric to separate the blue metal from the sand. 200mm of clean fine sand (Sydney sand) spread over the top of the fabric is held in place by the concrete surround. **Blitz Tipz:** Place a sheet of shade cloth over the sandpit when not in use to keep leaves and unwanted pets out.



Softfall: a softfall flooring system installed by Gadsby Surface Solutions provides a colourful, forgiving surface covering. The coloured rubber particles are mixed with a polyurethane binder and trowelled into place using a steel trowel. The rubber is available in plain primary colours or with flecks of other colours throughout, and can be moulded to any shape following the contours of the sub-base.



This small circular area cost about \$120 per square metre to lay. The system meets Australian Standards for use beneath children's play equipment and has a range of other uses such as on swimming pool surrounds and pathways and in areas beneath trees.

Garden beds: Jody improved the existing site soil by incorporating a premium organic mix throughout the garden beds. Eucalyptus mulch spread to a depth of 75mm will retain soil moisture and warmth while providing a contrasting background to planting and painted structures. **Blitz Tipz:** Do not dramatically increase soil levels over tree roots when creating new garden beds.

Plants

Hardy, prolific flowering trees and shrubs have been chosen to provide seasonal colour and texture in this busy environment.

Trees: tea-tree (*Leptospermum polygalifolium* 'Cardwell'), coast banksia (*Banksia integrifolia*), elaeocarpus (*Elaeocarpus reticulatus*), lemon-scented myrtle (*Backhousia citriodora*), lilly pilly (*Syzygium paniculatum*)

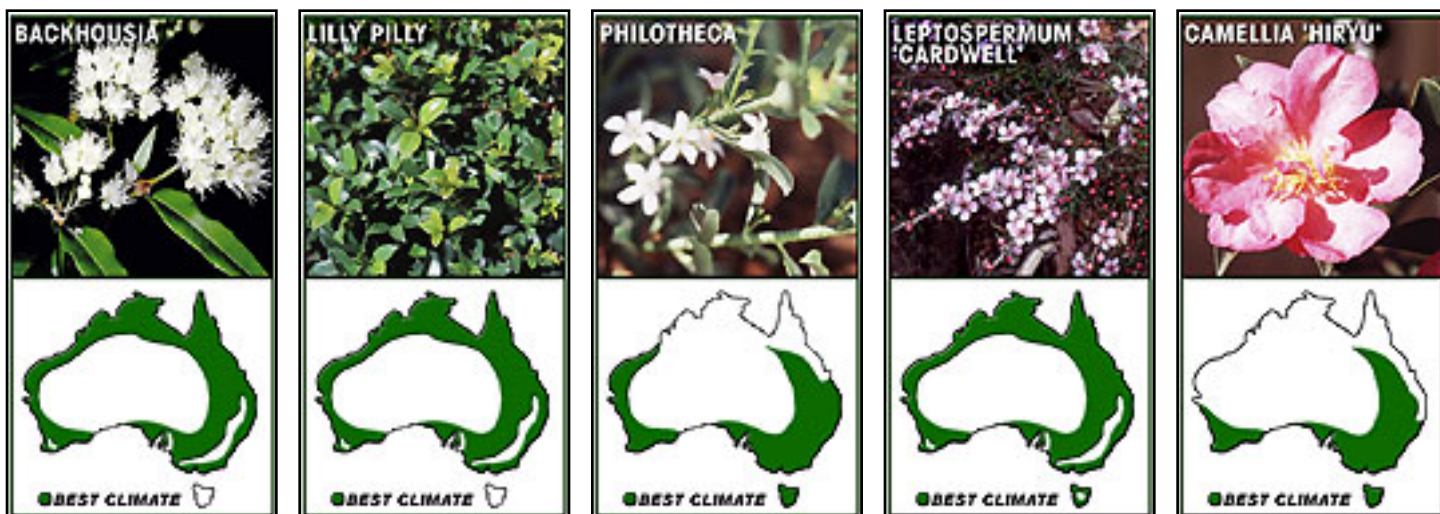
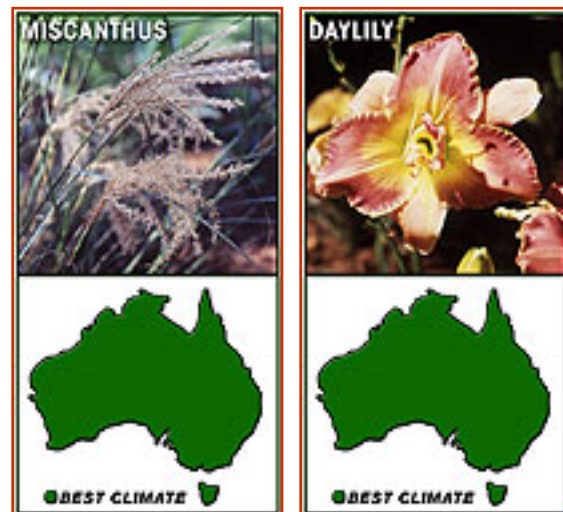
Shrubs: gardenia (*Gardenia augusta* 'Florida'), grevillea 'Moonlight' (*Grevillea* 'Moonlight'), camellia (*Camellia sasanqua* 'Hiryu'), philotheca (*Philotheca myoporoides* 'Bournda Beauty'), fatsia (*Fatsia japonica*),

Perennials: daylily (*Hemerocallis* cv.), French lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*)

chrysanthemum (*Chrysanthemum* 'Autumn Joy'), miscanthus (*Miscanthus sinensis* 'Sarabande')

Fern: bird's-nest fern (*Asplenium australasicum*)

Climbers: Carolina jasmine (*Gelsemium sempervirens*), stephanotis (*Stephanotis floribunda*), pandorea (*Pandorea jasminoides*)



Cost and availability

We used mature plants in our makeover to create an instant effect for television. As a result, our total cost for plants and materials was \$10,048. The use of smaller plants would have reduced the cost to \$7580.

Product details

- Large 'Stepstone' pavers cost \$45m2 and are manufactured by C & M Bricks, phone (02) 9748 1024. These pavers are also available at Amber outlets.
- Call Gadsby Surface Solutions in Sydney on (02) 9620 9550 for more details or view their website at www.softfall.com.au
- Most of the plants we used are readily available at - or can be ordered from - nurseries. Nurseries can also advise on similar varieties suited to your area. You may need to contact specialist nurseries for some plants. Your local nursery should be able to provide you with contacts.

- Most other materials are available from large hardware stores or building or landscape suppliers.
- All tools used are commonly available for hire, including the bobcat and the nail gun.

Getaway details

Accommodation:

Leisure Inns Tasmania Present
Penny Royal Motel - Apartments & Attractions
147 Paterson St
Launceston 7250
FREE CALL 1800 802 090
Email: headoffice@leisureinns.com.au
Website: www.leisureinns.com.au

Acknowledgments

Design by Andrew Davies from ICON Exteriors.
Phone (02) 9635 9090 or view the website at iconext.com.au

Construction by the Backyard Blitz team (all gardens are gifts from Backyard Blitz).

For more **Step by Step Constructions** [click here](#)



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Details on the fact sheets are accurate at the time of publishing, however prices and contact information are not updated and may change.