

# BACKYARD BLITZ

## Relax and enjoy

When Shane and Michael Clements bought their new house three years ago the backyard was dominated by two large, disused septic tanks. Michael, who works six days a week, decided to dig them out by hand on his days off! Shane contacted Backyard Blitz and asked if we could surprise her husband with a new backyard. We thought Michael deserved a break after all his hard work. We sent them for a yacht cruise and a night in a luxury hotel while we finished the garden.



Garden designer Colin Brown's plan was for a garden that complemented the wonderful bushland views from the garden and incorporated paving, lawn and a low maintenance garden. Design elements included a wooden fence cut into a decorative wave pattern, carved sandstone sculptures and two mirror-backed day beds that fold down from the walls of the house.



### What we did

We cleared the site and brought in 30 tonnes of crushed sandstone fill to level the area. A hardwood stake fence was built around three sides of the garden. The area under the second storey balcony was paved and the paving border cut to a curved shape with a demolition saw. Two sandstone sculptures were positioned among the plants and a garden light was installed to illuminate one of them. The gardens around the perimeter were planted out with easy-care plants, turf was laid and two fold-down day beds with decorative mirrors were built and mounted on the wall.

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## Materials

**Paving:** concrete pavers 390x190x50mm (Country Cobble sandstone smooth), paving sand, brickie's sand, cement and grout (Interlock). *Tools:* vibrating plate compactor, demolition saw (or brick saw), conduit, paintbrush, shovel, brickie's trowel, screed, screed rail, wheelbarrow, spirit level.

**Fence:** hardwood stakes (1500mm tomato stakes), galvanised fence wire, gripples, treated pine timber (100x100mm), fast setting concrete, copper staples (10mm), galvanised nails (50mm) *Tools:* conduit, circular saw, drill with 5mm bit, gripple tensioner, wire cutters, staple gun, shovel, bucket or hose, marker pen.

**Garden sculptures and lighting:** sandstone garden sculptures (a heron and a bowl), large river pebbles, fast setting cement (if necessary), low voltage garden light with transformer and cable, gel cap connectors, conduit and elbows (20mm), conduit adhesive. *Tools:* electrical screwdriver and pliers, shovel and spirit level, bucket or hose.

**Day beds and mirror frames:** treated pine timber (75x50mm & 50x25mm), hardwood stakes (tomato stakes), mirror (bronze 1800x900x4mm), butt hinges (100mm), latches (eye-hook type), plywood sheets (1800x900x12mm) mattress and cushions to match, sikaflex 11FC, bugle head batten screws (100mm), galvanised nails, bolts with nuts and washers (10mm), 12mmx100mm dynabolts. *Tools:* circular saw, electric screwdriver with screw, nut and allen key attachments, hammer or nail gun, spirit level, drill with 12mm, 10mm and 3mm bits. [Add paint colour]

**Garden beds, turf and edging:** plants and turf (see list below), 25x100mm treated pine edging, pegs (300mm), galvanised nails, turf underlay mix, native plant organic mix and leaf mulch. *Tools:* string line and spray marker, spade, turf roller and hedge shears.

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## 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.

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

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## 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.

## Paving

The paving was laid with a 90° herringbone pattern. The curved border was cut to shape with a demolition saw. The paving was finished by sweeping in a sand and silicon grout called Interlock.

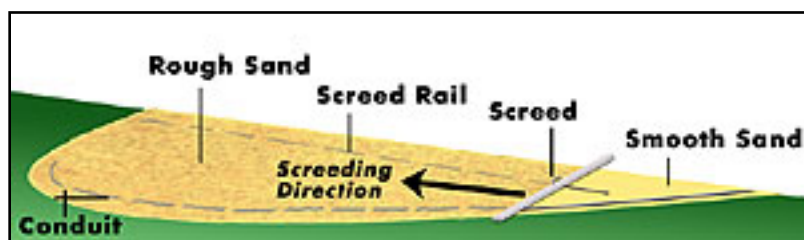
**Blitz Tipz:** Screeding to form a smooth level base on which to pave is the key to good paving. Screeding ensures the sand sub base is perfectly smooth and at the right slope to allow for drainage. To manage a large area lay screed rails (usually aluminium strips) to guide your screed. As we had to cut a curved shape for the edge of the paving we used a length of conduit as one of the screed rails. This was curved to form the border and laid at the right level for screeding.



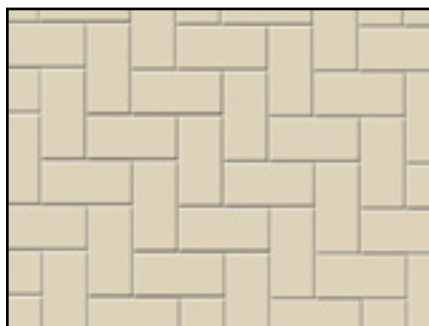
**Step 1** Clear the area to be paved and mark out with spray marker paint. Excavate if necessary, taking into account the thickness of the pavers (in our case 50mm) plus 100mm for road base and 30mm for paving sand.

**Step 2** Spread a layer of road base over the excavated area and compact to 100mm. Spread about a 30mm layer of paving sand over the compacted road base, level with a topsoil leveller and compact with a vibrating plate.

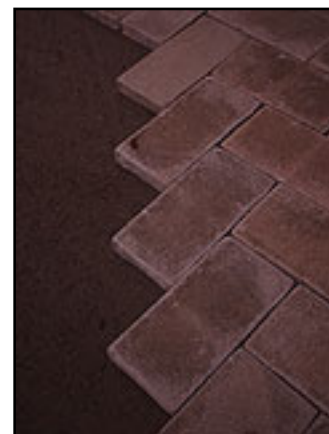
**Step 3** In preparation for the screeding set up two screed rails (we used a piece of conduit and an aluminium strip as described above). Start with the conduit, carefully forming it to the shape of the border and ensuring it is in the right position to get the final slope you require. Lay an aluminium strip on the opposite side again ensuring its position is correct. Lay the screed across the rails and screed in a sawing motion (see diagram).



**Step 4** Start laying the pavers along the longest straight side. We used a 90° herringbone pattern (see diagram). Continue paving the entire area. We laid the conduit just beyond the edge of the paving and paved up to it. If necessary remove conduit after screeding and fill in the trough with extra sand before beginning to lay the pavers.



**Herringbone pattern**



**Step 5** Once paving is complete, cut the curved border using the conduit as a guide. Lay the conduit over the paving to form the desired shape, mark with a marking pen and then remove the conduit. **Blitz Tipz:** If you are experienced in using power tools, the edge of the pavers can be cut in position using a dry demolition saw. Alternatively, lift each paver and cut it to shape using a brick saw (safer and less dust).



**Step 6** To hold the outside edges in position (unnecessary if up against a solid structure) make a sand and cement mix haunch (see diagram). Start by excavating a 100mm trench around the outside edge of the paved area. This trench is filled with cement (mix as per instructions on the bag). Use a brickie's trowel to compact cement against the side of the pavers taking care not to mound it too high and spoil the look of the paving, allow to set overnight.



**Step 7** To grout spread Interlock over the paving and sweep in with a broom to fill the gaps. Make sure paving is dry before you start then sweep and hose off excess grout.

**Blitz Tipz:** You can grout using grouting fine sand - ensure it is perfectly dry before sweeping it in.

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## Fence

We built a decorative fence around the edges of the garden using hardwood tomato stakes. To add interest alternate stakes were cut into a wave pattern.

The fence was built on top of an existing copper log retaining wall. The stakes were nailed to the logs. Unless you are building on top of a timber structure you will have to secure the stakes by driving them into the ground (using the method described below).

Tomato stakes come in a range of sizes and it will save time if you plan your fence height to coincide with a standard stake length remembering to take into account the portion (300mm) that's bedded in the ground.

For added support the stakes were stapled to two wires which were run between end posts. We used gripples to tension the wires (alternatively use shackles).

**Step 1** Mark out the position of the fence using a string line and spray marker paint. Excavate a 600mm deep post hole at each end.

**Step 2** Cut your end posts to length (calculate by adding your fence height plus the 600mm in-ground portion of the post), place them in their holes and use a spirit level to ensure they are vertical. Half fill the holes with water and add fast setting cement, watering and stirring as you go, until the hole is full. Hold each post in position for 4 minutes then allow the cement to set overnight before resuming work on the post.



**Blitz Tipz:** Gripples cost \$1.50 each and the tensioning tool is \$125 from rural suppliers and some hardware stores.

**Step 3** Drill 5mm holes 300mm down from the top and 300mm up from the bottom of each post. Thread one end of a 1m length of galvanised wire through the top hole in one of the posts, tie it off and slip the free end into a gripple. Slip the end of another length of wire into the same gripple, run it to the post at the other end, thread it through the top hole and tie it off after pulling as tight as possible by hand. Repeat this procedure for the bottom wire. Tension the wires with a gripple tensioner.

**Blitz Tipz:** If you are building a fence over 1m in height you will need a third wire spaced evenly between the other two. Check with your local council as approval may be required for fences over 1m or on a boundary.

**Step 4** Run a string line along the top of the fence to find the height of each stake as you drive it in. Attach the tomato stakes to the fence at 75mm intervals. Measure 75mm along the ground and drive the stake to a depth of 300mm. Use a spirit level to ensure it is vertical. Staple each stake to the wires.

**Blitz Tipz:** You may find it easier to space the stakes using a spacing block. Place a 75mm wide block of wood (for example a 50x75mm treated pine off-cut) on the ground against the base of the previous stake. Hold the stake you are about to drive hard up against the spacing block with your foot and drive the stake in. Drive it 100mm, use a spirit level to check it is vertical, correct if necessary then drive the stake the rest of the way.

**Step 5** Form the shape of a wave on the fence with a length of conduit, temporarily tying or taping it into position. Use a marker pen to clearly mark the wave on every second stake. Remove the conduit then cut the alternate stakes to length.

**Blitz Tipz:** Double check that you have marked the correct stakes before you cut. Scott placed every second stake upside down (pointy end up) to clearly indicate which ones had to be cut.



## Garden sculptures and lighting

We positioned two sandstone sculptures in the garden. One was a tall narrow sculpture of a heron which we cemented in to position, the other was a large squat bowl which did not require concreting. The heron sculpture was illuminated with a low voltage garden light. Large river pebbles were positioned around the base of the sculpture to help hide the lamp.

**Blitz Tipz:** It is important that garden sculptures are stable as they are heavy and could pose a danger if they fall over. Determine the stability of your sculpture. If it is likely to be unstable (for example a tall narrow piece) concrete it in to position use the concreting method outlined below. Stable sculptures like the squat bowl we used may be simply placed in the garden in a level spot.



## Cementing method

**Step 1** Mark out the position of the sculpture and clear the area. Excavate a hole to a suitable depth (at least 200mm but up to 400mm for very tall narrow sculptures or those that are top heavy) and about 200mm wider than the base of the sculpture.

**Step 2** Place the sculpture in the hole and half fill with water. Tip fast setting cement into the hole, watering and stirring as you go, until the hole is full. Hold in position for 4 minutes while the cement

starts to set. Leave overnight for the concrete to fully set before resuming work in the area.

**Blitz Tipz:** Make sure all splashed concrete is washed off the sculpture before it sets.

## Garden lighting

**Step 1** Mount the transformer for the low voltage garden lights near an existing electrical outlet. Excavate a trench for the conduit from the transformer location to the light location and lay the conduit, cutting to length, inserting elbows where necessary and threading the cable through as you go. Fill in the trench and replace any turf or earth disturbed in the process.

**Blitz Tipz:** Wiggling the conduit as you push the cable through makes the job much easier.

**Step 2** Position the light (the one we used was fitted with a peg that pushed into the ground) and connect it to the low voltage cable using gel cap connectors. Connect the low voltage cable to the transformer and test. Adjust the direction of the light beam for maximum effect.

**Blitz Tipz:** If possible plan your garden so the lamps are hidden by plants or landscape features.

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## Day beds and mirrors

Two fold-down day beds were mounted on the wall under the balcony. When in the up position they acted as decorative screens over the mirrors to break up the reflected image. The base of the day bed was made from tomato stakes and cut into a double wave pattern to match the fence. When folded down a plywood sheet and mattress are positioned into the frame so it becomes a bed.

As the mirror frame and day bed frame are built to identical sizes you will need to give consideration to the size of bed you want and therefore the size of mirror you will need. Our mirrors were 1800x900mm - the size of a comfortable single bed. The beds were painted with Murowash 'Banksia'.



**Daybed folded against the mirror on the wall**

**Step 1** Cut a sheet of plywood to the same dimensions as the mirror and use sikaflex 11FC to adhere them together, allow to set for 12 hours.

**Step 2** Make matching frames for the mirror and day bed by cutting 75x50mm treated pine timber to length and screwing together. Use two bugle head batten screws per joint after drilling pilot holes. The cross beams are butted into the side beams. Cut an additional cross beam and

**Daybed unfolded and fitted with a plywood base and mattress**

locate it in the centre of the day bed and nail stakes to it to keep them stable. Unlike the other cross beams it should be mounted on its flat rather than its edge and recessed down from the top (mattress) side of the bed by 12mm.

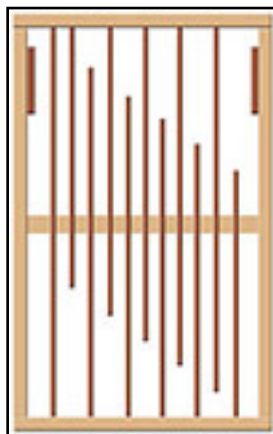


**Step 3** Nail timber beading (50x25mm treated pine) around the inside of the mirror frame flush with the front edge, locate the mirror and backing into the frame and angle nail to secure (see diagram).

**Step 4** Hold or prop the frame in position on the wall ensuring it is at the right height and use a spirit level to ensure it is level. Drill four evenly spaced 12mm diameter holes through the bottom of the frame and into the wall to a depth of 100mm. Drill holes (to the same dimensions) 150mm down from the top on each side of the frame. Use dynabolts to secure the frame to the wall.

**Blitz Tipz:** The height of the mirror frame determines the height of the day bed - take this into consideration when mounting the frame.

**Step 5** Nail timber beading (50x25mm treated pine) around the inside of the day bed frame recessed 12mm from the top (mattress) edge. Do not bead the last 400mm on either side of the frame at the foot end to leave room for the legs (but do bead across the bottom of the frame). Nail tomato stakes lengthwise on the under side of the frame to the beading and the central cross beam at 75mm spacings, alternating the ends from which you start. Mark wave patterns on the stakes and cut the stakes after double checking you've got it right. Remember that the wave pattern is repeated - once in the stakes emanating from the top and once in the stakes emanating from the bottom (see diagram).

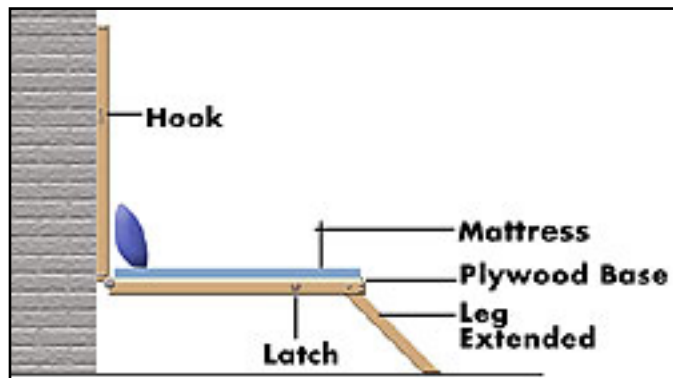


**Step 6** Mount four butt hinges evenly spaced along the bottom of the mirror frame and attach the day bed frame. Swing it up into the closed position and mount a latch on each side.

**Blitz Tipz:** To make the day bed child safe mount the latches as high as possible.

**Step 7** Unlatch the day bed and swing it down to the desired angle, hold or prop in position.

**Blitz Tipz:** Use a pile of bricks or timber off-cuts to hold the bed in position while you work on it.



**Step 8** To make a leg, hold a piece of 50x75mm timber in position against the inside of the frame

near the foot of the bed (see diagram). It should extend down to the floor and back at an angle. It should also press against the bed frame at the foot of the bed - as it will when in use. Drill a 10mm hole through the frame and the leg. Remove the leg and cut to length 20mm above the location of the hole. Make another leg identical and drill a hole in the other side of the frame mirroring the position of the first. Bolt the legs into position placing a washer between the frame and the leg as you assemble them which will allow freedom of movement.

Blitz Tipz: Ensure you do not position the leg too high in the frame as it will interfere with the placement of the bed base.

Step 9 Make a bed base by cutting a sheet of plywood to the inside dimensions of the day bed frame.

Blitz Tipz: You may wish to cut some slots near the centre of the base spaced 600mm apart which will act as hand holes to make lifting the base out easier.

Step 10 Test the bed by lowering it into the 'down' position with the legs extended fully. Place the base into the frame and cover with a mattress and cushions. Return the mattress, cushions and base to their storage location, raise the day bed to its 'up' position and latch. Ensure the legs are retracted back into the frame.

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## Garden beds, turf, edging

To make the backyard level we brought in 30 tonnes of crushed sandstone fill, which is an ideal growing medium for natives. Native mix was added to the crushed sandstone in the garden beds which provides the nutrients native plants require and is low in phosphorus. Australian natives don't like high phosphorus levels.

Remember to keep plants the same depth as they were in their containers, spread a 50mm layer of organic mulch (we used leaf mulch) and water.

## Our plants

Coast Rosemary (*Westringia fruticosa*), Cabbage Tree (*Cordyline australis*), Lomandra (*Lomandra longifolia*), Blue Sedge (*Carex riparia*), Poa 'Eskdale'. Turf: Kikuyu.



**Coast  
Rosemary**



**Cabbage  
Tree**





**Lomandra**



**Blue Sedge**



**Poa  
'Eskdale'**



**Kikuyu  
Lawn**

Laying the turf: We laid turf between the paving and the garden beds. The beds were edged with treated pine garden edging to define the garden beds and to stop grass growing into the beds. In preparation for the turf we used a turf underlay mix from a landscape supplier.

Step 1 Mark out the edge of the garden beds and mark with spray marker paint. Dig out the edges of the garden bed with a spade following the paint line. 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 2 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.

Step 3 Roll out the turf starting along the longest straight edge, and cutting to shape with hedge shears where required. Roll with a lawn roller and water.

Blitz Tipz: Walking on freshly laid turf or allowing dogs to play on it can cause damage. It will take a couple of weeks for it to get established.

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## **Cost and availability**

We used mature plants to create an instant effect for television. Our total cost (plants and materials) was \$9668. Considerable savings are possible using smaller plants (\$7789).

- Plants are readily available at nurseries or ask your nursery to order plants for you.
- Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, building suppliers, or landscape suppliers.
- Sandstone sculptures - look under 'Sculptors' in your Yellow Pages (ours were from Ishibuki Garden Art (02) 9970 6122).
- Country Cobble pavers and Interlock grout from Amber Tiles and Pavers (02) 8822 7777. Available east coast or phone for details of interstate deliveries.
- The vibrating plate compactor, demolition saw, post hole shovel, and most of the other tools required are available for hire.