

# BACKYARD BLITZ

## Underground Bungalow



Bruce and Margaret Dunn have always longed for a peaceful place in the bush. They have spent the last 2 years building their architect-designed home in a rural pocket of the NSW north coast. However, unlike most dream homes this 3 bedroom bungalow is invisible from the street as it is entirely underground. Thousands of tonnes of rock and earth were excavated to make way for a unique home that enables Bruce and Margaret to shut the rest of the world away and look out onto a beautiful rural vista.



## Design intent

The challenge of this project was to blend the garden with the surrounding environment just like the house. Landscape designer Greg Bell from Rare Earth Landscape Designs has created a front yard that envelopes the underground bungalow through the use of raised organic mounds planted out with bold textured plants and a scattering of native trees and shrubs.

## Design ideas

Privacy was a major reason that Bruce and Margaret moved to this rural block. Our design creates privacy through the clever positioning of swales (vegetated embankments) and dense plantings. The lesson to learn here is that privacy does not always have to be achieved with built structures.

## Adapting this plan to your garden

Make a detailed scale drawing of your yard (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 required amounts of materials.

**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 approvals:** Coordinating material delivery times and finding a location to store them requires careful planning. If you need to store materials on the roadway for a short time make sure they cannot travel into the stormwater system. Hay bales, stormwater pipes and bunding are all available at the local hardware and will help to prevent materials from fouling local creeks.

## Getting started

A bobcat was used to remove the existing vegetation from the site and to drill holes for the galvanized posts to be used for the shade sails. Bulk materials like roadbase and soil were brought in with the bobcat.

## Garden elements



**Shade Structure:** Shade is a vital ingredient for entertaining in the bush so Scotty connected two shade sails to cast the longest possible shadow throughout the day. For each sail two galvanised posts (125mm diameter) were sunk 1200mm deep into the ground and secured with rapid set concrete. The sails were attached to pre-welded lugs on the posts and to two screw eyes drilled into the wall of the house and anchored with Chemset. A professional tension device was used to tension the sails, however turnbuckles, d-shackles and chains will suffice in a residential space. **Blitz Tipz:** Shade sails can act like a sail during high winds and may damage structures or become dangerous. Always consult a qualified builder or engineer before fixing sails to your house.



**Bagging:** The bare concrete block walls of the house were given a facelift through the application of bagging and a paint job. Jamie created a rough textured appearance by using a broom to bag the besser block walls. He used a 4:1 mix (4 parts sand and 1 part cement) then added bricklayer's clay to make it more workable and sticky. To minimise the chance of cracking Jamie applied his mix 2mm-3mm thick making sure he filled up the masonry joints to make it smooth. A low sheen exterior acrylic was applied to the bagged walls. **Blitz Tipz:** The texture and consistency of your bagging mix has an impact on the quality of the job. Always select a sand type that is high in clay content.



**Paving:** Nigel extended the existing pathway at the front of the house to improve access using brand new paving. The patio area was extended to give it a feeling of openness and accessibility. The formal shape at the front of the house was enhanced with straight paths and a formal entrance way with gardens on either side. A 100mm layer of fine crushed rock (roadbase) was moistened and compacted with using a plate compactor. A 30mm layer of coarse washed river sand went on top of the base. Nigel made sure that the new pavers sat flush with the existing pavers by using an offcut paver as a measuring gauge. Nigel then laid 450 x 450mm Bluestone pavers on top of this. Be aware that pavers will settle about 5mm after being laid. **Blitz Tipz:** When laying pavers, avoid digging in one edge of the paver and disturbing all the sand around it. Place the paver nice & flat onto the sand leaving the rest of the sand undisturbed.



**Australian Hardwood Outdoor Setting:** Scott built an outdoor setting out of dressed Australian hardwood. This setting is made of blackbutt timber. He braced together lengths of pre-cut hardwood to form a rectangular tabletop (700mm-900mm high) and attached the crossed legs (450mm high) to the braces underneath. The bench seats are the same principle but lower (450mm high) and a little bit narrower. **Blitz Tipz:** Dressed hardwood has gone through a machine and all edges smoothed. Dressed timber has the advantage that all pieces are accurately sawn to the same size. Pre-drill holes before installing screws and countersink screws to avoid injury and catching on clothes.

**Sculptural Installation:** Jamie used recycled wharf timber to create the artistic element to the design. He sank 7 pieces of timber about 800mm deep and arranged them artistically and filled the holes with Rapid Set concrete.



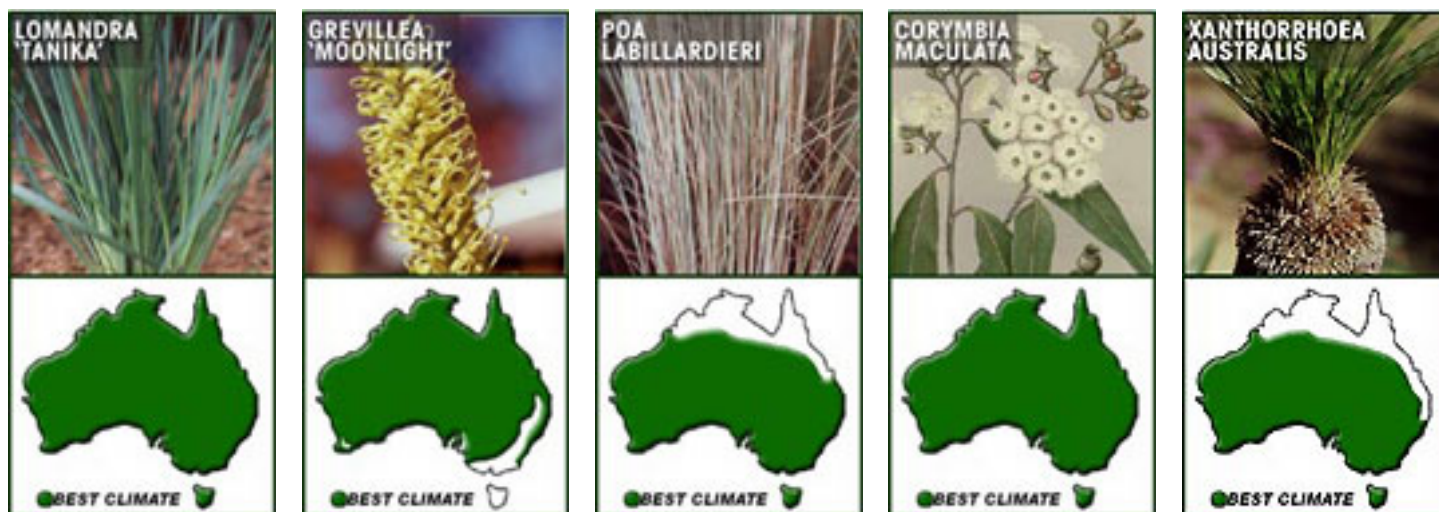
**Plants:** Jody used swathes of texture by using lots of ornamental grasses, clumping groundcovers, eucalypts, white cedar and grevilleas. For architectural effect, she also used grass trees. To improve the soil, she brought in a soil mix suitable for the above plants.

**Trees:** spotted gum (*Corymbia maculata*), bangalay (*Eucalyptus botryoides*), white cedar (*Melia azedarach* var. *australasica*)

**Grasses:** fine leaf lomandra (*Lomandra longifolia* 'Tanika'), poa (*Poa labillardieri* 'Eskdale'), carex (*Carex* 'Frosted Curls'), flax lily (*Dianella caerulea* and *Dianella revoluta*), New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax*)

**Shrubs:** grevillea (*Grevillea* 'Moonlight'), grass tree (*Xanthorrhoea australis*)

**Turf:** couch



## Cost and availability

We used some mature plants in our makeover to create an instant effect for television. As a result, our total cost for plants and materials was \$15,225. The use of smaller plants would have reduced the cost to \$12,760.

## Product details

- 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.
- Nigel laid Bluestone pavers from Wilsonstone. They cost around \$65 per square metre and the RTM concrete pavers cost about \$35 per square metre depending on which state you live in.
- Jamie's recycled wharf timbers were from A. J. Phillips Trading and cost \$200 each.
- The shade sails are from Advance Shade Sails and cost about \$3000 each.
- Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, building or landscape suppliers.
- All tools used are commonly available for hire.



### Getaway details

Sails Resort  
20 Park St  
Port Macquarie, NSW  
Reservations: 1800 025 271  
Phone: (02) 6583 3999  
Fax: (02) 6584 0397  
Web: [www.sailsresort.com.au](http://www.sailsresort.com.au)



Port Macquarie Cruise Adventures  
PO Box 1533  
Port Macquarie, NSW  
Phone: 1300 555 890  
Fax: (02) 6582 3704  
Email: [info@cruiseadventures.com.au](mailto:info@cruiseadventures.com.au)

Whale Bone Wharf Restaurant  
Hastings River Drive  
Port Macquarie, NSW  
Phone: (02) 6583 2334



### Acknowledgments

Design by Greg Bell from Rare Earth Landscape Designs Phone: 0404 043 788 Construction by the Backyard Blitz team (all gardens are a gift from Backyard Blitz).

For more Step by Step Constructions click here

