

BACKYARD BLITZ

Home Away From Home



Sue Medhurst has fostered over 260 children in the last 20 years. These children generally come from a traumatised family situation - some are born with a drug/alcohol addiction, while others are victims of abuse. Sue gives her foster kids as much love, care and kindness as she can before they return to their 'improved families' or to new families.

Design intent

The challenge was to provide a garden for kids and grown-ups that incorporated fun, activity and game zones mixed with stylish timber work and lush new gardens. Landscape designer, Lisa Whitton, has created a garden that caters for all who use the space. An interactive kids water feature, a hopscotch game court and a lawn area are all visible from the split level deck and bench seating. Shade and privacy have been created with overhead sails and screen planting along the boundaries.

Design ideas

Most children love being outdoors and having an active play space. The difficulty in designing such a space is that the kids want seclusion but their carers need to be able to keep an eye on them. The split-level deck in this garden enables both kids and carers to be in the same space without imposing on each other. Once again, defining spaces and rooms within the garden has been the primary design tool used in this garden.



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 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: Check with your local council or water supplier regarding water restrictions. We employed a plumber to ensure that no water is wasted in our water feature and that all regulations can be met.

Getting started

A bobcat was used to excavate the site and to create trenching for the water feature and associated plumbing. Post holes were drilled with the auger on the bobcat for both the deck and shade sails.

Garden elements

Split-level deck: Scott knocked up another of his famous decks, but added a twist. The slope from the rear of the house to the new lawn required several steps, so a split-level deck was created. H3 treated pine was used for all parts of the deck except the posts, which are H4. Bearers (140x45mm) were bolted to the posts (90x90mm) with galvanised cup-head bolts (150x10mm). Joists (90x45mm) were skew-nailed perpendicular to the tops of the bearers at 450mm centres. Wall plates were bolted to the wall of the house to support that end of the deck. Two different decking board sizes (90x20mm and 70x20mm) were used, with the smaller boards stained and laid at regular intervals. The boards were nailed to the joists with stainless steel, spiral-shanked nails fired from a nail gun. A simple set of boxed steps was constructed leading from the top level to the lower level, and a fascia of decking boards was run around the perimeter of the posts to disguise the underneath of the deck. **Blitz Tip:** Pre-staining long lengths of timber before fixing saves time and reduces mess.



Water feature: Jamie built a water feature as an interactive game for the kids. Channel drains (2x3m and 2x1m) were set on brick footings. An underground sump (600x600x600mm) was fitted with an automatic float valve, so that it fills up automatically when needed. A new tap was hard-plumbed near the fence for manual control. The channel drains were covered with 15mm fibre cement sheeting, then professionals wetpoured rubber (soft fall rubber) over the sheeting. A drip edge was glued in place, channeling the overflow to the drain beneath. Tubing (13mm) runs under the soft fall area, coming up via three 13mm plastic risers (one in the centre and one at either end) acting as water spouts. The submersible pond pump delivers 7000 litres/hr and is powered by a low voltage transformer that reduces the 240 volt household power source to 24 volts. **Blitz Tipz:** A licensed plumber will charge about \$220 to install a new water pipe and tap in the garden.



Hopscotch: Using a 4:1 mortar mix, Nigel laid concrete pavers in a hopscotch pattern. Jody painted numbers on each paver. The paver at the top section of the hopscotch game was cut with a wet demolition saw. **Blitz Tipz:** Use a paving paint appropriate for outdoor use on your hopscotch court.



Potted plants: Jody added good quality potting mix to two blue pots, which she then planted with low maintenance cordyline and sedum. The potted plants brighten up the new deck, and also add architectural highs and lows with their different growth habits. **Blitz Tipz:** Planting out pots in one location keeps the mess in one area. Roll pots into place on a trolley, skateboard, or on their bottom edge.



Garden plants: Jody thinks people underestimate the aesthetic value of citrus. For an instant effect, she planted four semi-mature Eureka lemon trees against the blue fence which in the future will contrast beautifully with the yellow fruit. The garden along the side fence has been planted with lilly pillies as a screen, and underplanted with groundcovers and plants with grass-like foliage. **Blitz Tipz:** Lemons are not low maintenance plants. They need feeding twice per year (February and August) and should be mulched right out to the drip line.



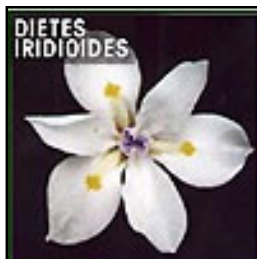
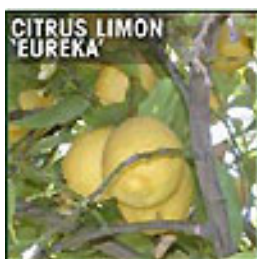
Shade sails: In summer, the backyard can get unbearably hot so Nigel erected two triangular shade sails (5x5x5m, Desert Sand colour), one to go above the deck and the other above the water feature. Galvanized turnbuckles, d-shackles and chain were used to create tension and lift the sails above each other. Three posts were sunk 1700mm in the ground and concreted in place. The attachment points for the sails are the roof rafters and the galvanized posts. **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.

Plants

Trees: small leaved lilly pilly (*Acmena smithii* var. *minor*), rose apple (*Syzygium jambos*), flowering ash (*Fraxinus griffithii*), eureka lemon (*Citrus limon* 'Eureka')

Perennials: New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax* 'Purpureum'), ajuga (*Ajuga reptans* 'Catlin's Giant'), African daisy (*Arctotis* hybrids), lirioppe (*Liriope muscari* 'Evergreen Giant'), wild iris (*Diets iridioides*)

Shrubs: New Zealand cabbage tree (*Cordyline australis* 'Purpurea'), sedum (*Sedum* 'Gold Mound'), blue statice (*Limonium perezii*), hebe (*Hebe* 'Inspiration').



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 \$11,102. The use of smaller plants would have reduced the cost to \$8,828.

Product details

- The triangular shade sails and accessories are part of the Coolaroo range and cost about \$200 each. They are available at large hardware stores and garden centres.
- The water feature cost about \$2100 to construct, including a new tap and float valve installed by a licensed plumber.
- 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 mini loader and the nail gun.



Getaway details

Accommodation:
Peppers Anchorage Port Stephens
Corlette Point Road
Corlette NSW
Phone: 02 4984 2555
Fax: 02 4984 0300
www.peppers.com.au

Imagine Cruises
Sailing daily from d'Albora Marina
Dock 'C'
Nelson Bay, Port Stephens
Web: www.portstephens.org.au/imagine

Tilligerry Habitat Ecotourism Centre
Tilligerry Plaza
President Wilson Walky
Tanilba Bay
Phone: 02 4982 4441



Acknowledgments

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Association of Children's Welfare Agencies
Foster Care Inquiry Line 1800 629 628

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

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