

# BACKYARD BLITZ

## Suburban Oasis



Jaques Saupin has been one of Jenny Middleton's best friends for over 15 years. He has stood by her through all the trials and tribulations faced by a single mum working long hours as she raised three toddlers. Jaques has renovated his home but a condition affecting his foot has limited his ability to renovate the garden. So Jenny asked the Blitz team for their help. Jaques loves golf, so we sent him with his brother Deni to the Cypress Lakes Resort in the Hunter Valley for two days of fun on the fairways.

Brendan Lewis' design transformed this small, suburban yard into a luxurious tropical oasis, while still providing functional storage and access. Palms, cordylines and tropical plants now provide a happy play of light, colour and exotic foliage against a neutral grey backdrop. Soft timber paving provides an inviting entertaining area with garden setting and umbrella. Stepping stones lead through the jungle to an inconspicuous garden shed and a new back fence and gate. A water bowl with floating silk water lilies adds a final touch of tranquillity.



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**What we did:** We cleared all unwanted vegetation, demolished a concrete slab and removed existing turf using a turfcutter. An old garden shed was dismantled and a new garden shed installed in its place. We built a new rear fence and gate and painted the back wall and fences. A timber-paved entertaining area was constructed using treated pine sleepers and provided with a garden setting and umbrella. Stepping stones were laid along access routes and the garden was planted and mulched. A water bowl was provided with floating silk flowers.



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## Materials

**Timber paving:** treated pine sleepers (2400x200x75mm), paving sand, grouting sand and galvanised nails. Tools: saw, tape measure, pencil, adjustable square, ear muffs, goggles, screed rails, screed, level, stringline, hammer or nail gun and nail punch.

**Garden shed:** 2000x2400mm Colorbond shed ordered in panel form (comes complete with rivets). Tools: drill and rivet gun.

**Fencing:** (all timbers in treated pine) posts (100x100x2400mm) and (150x50x2400mm), fence rails (75x50mm), fence palings (100x15x1800mm) and (100x12x1800mm), fence capping, gate hinges and latches, galvanised screws and nails, rapid set concrete, low gloss exterior acrylic paint. Tools: stringline, shovel or auger, pencil, tape measure, adjustable square, saw, hammer, nail gun, spirit level and paint brush, roller and tray or spraygun.

**Painting:** low sheen exterior acrylic paint. Tools: paintbrushes, roller and tray.

**Stepping stones:** Boral Almond Promenade 400x400x60mm concrete pavers, sand/cement or mortar mix, or brickies sand and cement. Tools: spade, wheelbarrow, larry hoe, spirit level and trowel.

**Planting:** organic garden mix, leaf mulch, see plant list for plant species. Tools: spade, shovel, wheelbarrow and rake.

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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. Call 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.

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## Timber paving

Our paved area consisted of two rows of sleepers lying face down with a line of sleepers on edge running down the midline and sides.



**Step 1** Sketch your sleeper layout prior to commencing work. Arrange your paving with regard to surrounding structures. Plan sleeper layout to minimise timber wastage. You will probably have to cut your sleepers to ensure that they are all exactly the same length, or else get them pre-cut by the supplier.

**Step 2** Mark out the area to be paved. Excavate to 175mm below finished level. This allows 100mm for paving sand plus 75mm for the sleepers.

**Step 3** Dig a trench about 250mm deep and at least 100mm wide along the centre and sides of your paved area to allow room for the sleepers on edge.

**Step 4** Place about 50mm of paving sand in your midline trench and screed sand level and 200mm below your finished paving height. Ensuring paving slopes away from house. Carefully lay these sleepers in place, ensuring that they are in line and perpendicular to, or parallel with, any nearby structures. You may need help laying sleepers to avoid digging one end into your sand bed.

**Step 5** Bring in 100mm of paving sand for main paved area. Screed sand level and 75mm below finished paving height. Starting from one end, lay sleepers in place down both sides of midline. Take care with first few to ensure they are laid perpendicular to the midline. Check this every few sleepers as you go along. You can leave small gaps if needed to keep paving square. These will be filled with sand later.

**Step 6** Carefully cut and screed sand along sides to 200mm below the top of the sleepers. Place sleepers on edge along sides. Backfill firmly against edge sleepers. Alternatively, you can use hardwood pegs, metal rods or concrete to help retain edges if they are raised above ground level.

**Step 7** Skew nail sleeper paving to edge and midline sleepers to help stabilize paving. (Skew nailing is nailing at an angle through the side of one piece of timber into the one below.)

**Blitz Tipz:** If you use a hammer to skew nail the sleepers together, stand on the sleeper you are nailing into to stop it from moving.

**Step 8** Using a nail punch, drive nail heads below the surface of the timber. Sweep grouting sand through the joints for strength and to provide a smooth finish.

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## Garden shed

We purchased our shed in panel form. This means the shed is preassembled into panels which are already framed. This saves a lot of time and difficulty in assembly of the shed.

**Step 1** Assemble the panels together using the rivets provided. If you don't have a rivet gun and don't want to hire one, the supplier can supply you with self-tapping screws instead.

**Step 2** Position door resting on two 20 cent coins as shown by Scott on the show. This ensures adequate clearance so that the door will swing freely on its hinges. Rivet or screw hinges into place.

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## Fencing

**Step 1** Mark out fence line and locate post positions. Dig 600mm deep holes for each post using a shovel or auger.

**Step 2** Place the end posts into position first, one at a time. Use a spirit level to ensure each post is exactly vertical on two sides. 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 firms (about 4 mins) it will set in about 15 mins.

**Step 3** Set up two stringlines. One running along the top corner to set the height of your posts. Run a second stringline along the base of your fence. This will make it much easier to line up the remaining posts. Repeat Step 2 for all remaining posts.

**Note:** In some situations where access is limited you may find it easier to place your rails through your posts prior to concreting them in place.

**Step 4** Insert rails through posts and nail them in place. Cut off any excess flush with posts. Ensure joins in rails occur inside posts. **Blitz Tipz:** You really need to hire a fencing gun to do jobs like this. They are so fast, simple to use and provide minimal disruption to posts and rails. More importantly, they enable you to do the job single-handed, as you can hold palings in place with one hand and fire in the nails with the other. Fencing gun costs about \$75 per day to hire, including compressor and hoses. Nails cost about \$7.50 for 320.

**Step 5** Starting from one of the posts, fasten the first layer of palings (150x12mm) spaced 100mm apart. Cut a 100mm spacer block to help you keep the spacings even. Hold paling in place with its top at the stringline. Fire off one nail into the top rail to hold it in place. Check that it looks vertical and evenly spaced, adjusting if required. Then fire off two nails into each of the three rails. Repeat this process, checking vertical from time to time with a spirit level.

**Step 6** Next fasten the second (lap) layer of palings (100x15mm). Each paling should overlap the palings beneath by about 25mm each side. Follow the same procedure as in Step 5.

**Step 7** Fasten the capping running along the top of the posts. Ensure any joins occur over posts. Cut off any excess flush with posts.

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## Painting

We chose a grey coloured, low sheen, exterior acrylic paint for the fence and wall as a neutral backdrop to highlight the lush foliage of our garden and match our shed.

**Step 1** Ensure surfaces to be painted are relatively clean and free of loose material. Clean with a stiff brush if needed.

**Step 2** Paint. We used a roller to paint our walls and fences as it is a lot quicker than brushes.

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## Stepping stones

**Step 1** Lay out the pavers along the ground surface to determine their positioning. Space pavers evenly and walk along them to ensure that they provide comfortable steps. When you are satisfied with their position, spade cut around each paver to mark its location and place paver to the side.

**Step 2** Excavate under paver to allow room for paver and mortar. Place pavers on a bed of about 50mm of 4:1 mortar (four parts brickies sand to one part cement). Use a rubber mallet to gently tap pavers level and into line.

**Step 3** Repeat Step 2 for all of the pavers. Take care not to disturb pavers until mortar has set.



## Garden beds

**Step 1** We incorporated a layer of around 200mm of organic garden mix into the site soil to about a spade's depth. This was to improve the existing soil structure and add nutrients.

**Step 2** Position your plants prior to planting. When you are happy with the layout, plant one at a time, ensuring that plants are placed at the same depth in the soil as they were in their containers.

**Step 3** Mulch by spreading a 50mm layer of organic mulch (we used leaf mulch) over the garden beds and then water.



## Our plants

Alexandra palm (*Archontophoenix alexandrae*), compact selloum (sold as *Philodendron 'Roystonii'*), cordyline glauca (*Cordyline glauca*), cordyline negra (*Cordyline terminalis 'Negra'*), cordyline nigra (*Cordyline terminalis 'Nigra'*), palm lily (*Cordyline petiolaris*), evergreen giant (*Liriope muscari 'Evergreen Giant'*), golden cane palm (*Dypsis lutescens*, formerly *Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*), jungle gem (*Schefflera heptaphylla 'Jungle Gem'*), kentia palm (*Howea forsteriana*), native violet (*Viola hederacea*), variegated shell ginger (*Alpinia zerumbet 'Variegata'*).



golden cane palm



jungle gem



kentia palm



native violet





compact selloum



variegated shell ginger



Cordylines



cordyline glauca



cordyline negra



cordyline nigra

## Cost and availability

We used mature plants in our makeover to create an instant effect for television. Our total cost of plants and materials was \$6616. Considerable savings are possible using smaller plants, reducing the total cost to \$4439.

- Lapped and capped treated pine fencing can be ordered by the metre from your local suppliers for about \$40 per lineal metre. Check under 'Fencing Materials' in your local Yellow Pages for suppliers in your area.
- Our 2000x2400mm Colorbond garden shed was ordered in panel form from Advance Sheds, Sydney, phone: (02) 9673 1423 and cost \$803. Check under 'Garden Sheds' in your local Yellow Pages for suppliers in your area.
- Our garden setting comprised a Merivale setting at around \$399 with a Como Umbrella at \$119. Both available nationwide from Barbecues Galore.
- Stepping stones: Boral Almond Promenade 400x400x60mm Concrete Pavers. Available in QLD, ACT and NSW through Amber Tiles. Priced from \$40 a square metre. Different versions are available in all states with similar dimensions and colours available.
- Ceramic water bowl and silk water lilies from Patio Garden Design, Sydney, phone: (02) 9955 5612. The silk water lilies cost \$11 each for small ones and \$23 for large ones. The ceramic water bowl is 270mm high by 470mm diameter and costs \$95.
- Most of the selected plants are readily available at nurseries or ask your nursery to order them for you.
- Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, building suppliers, or landscape suppliers.
- All tools used are commonly available for hire.

**Acknowledgments:** Design by Brendan Lewis, phone: 0409 122 269. Construction by the Backyard

Blitz team.