

BACKYARD BLITZ

Viva la Mexicana!



Rita Ralston is a fun-loving mother who always looks for the good in life. Despite the difficulties of divorce and single parenting she has raised her kids with a spirit of fun and happiness. She is very young at heart and loves bright colours, partying and travelling. Rita's daughter Belinda contacted the Blitz team and asked for our help. We sent Rita and her boyfriend Richard to Sea World Nara Resort on the Gold Coast to frolic in the sun and swim with the dolphins.

The design creates a festive Mexican garden from a desolate suburban yard. A sense of excitement and anticipation pervades the vibrant colours of triumphant metal arches and robust timber screens. Rows of palms sway like bright green fans in the breeze against the rich burgundy of the fences. An understory of flowering shrubs provide sparks of colour throughout the garden. An illuminated cement ball fountain and chimenea (Mexican fireplace) add Mexican flair to this garden that was born to party!



What we did: We cleared all unwanted vegetation, partly demolished a brick barbecue and removed existing turf using a turf cutter. We relocated an existing garden shed and clothesline. We built and painted a series of metal arches and timber screens. A paved entertaining area was constructed using concrete pavers. We planted a grove of palms with bright underplantings and turfed the clothes line area. A Mexican chimenea, colourful garden setting and innovative pond with cement ball fountain completed the festive feel of the garden.

Materials

Steel arches: 200x200mm square hollow section (SHS) steel, 200x100mm rectangular hollow section (RHS) steel, welding rods, rapid set concrete and paint (we used Murobond Murowash Moscow Paint). *Tools:* shovel or auger, angle grinder, electric arc welder, spirit level, tape measure, water level, clamps, leather gloves, apron, welding mask, ear and eye protection and paint brush, roller and tray or spraygun.

Paving: Besser 390x194x40mm capping pieces, road base, paving sand, grouting sand, rapid set concrete. *Tools:* stringline, rubber mallet, spirit level, vibrating plate compactor, brick saw or angle grinder, topsoil leveller, larry hoe or shovel, rake, brickie's trowel, screed, screed rails and wheelbarrow.

Decorative timber screens: 150x50mm routed treated pine fence posts, 75x50mm treated pine rails, galvanised nails, rapid set concrete and paint (we used Murobond Murowash Deep Bordeaux 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.

Barbecue surrounds: pressed commons bricks, mortar mix, paint (we used Murobond Murowash Saffron). *Tools:* lump hammer and bolster, ear and eye protection, spade, larry hoe, wheelbarrow, brickie's trowel, spirit level, stringline, tape measure, sponge and bucket, paint brush.

Pond and fountain: Hydor Hydrogarden L30 24V submersible pump and transformer, Rio mini tube light and transformer, 380 litre polypropylene stock trough, 500mm diameter cement ball, pebbles. *Tools:* Spade, shovel, wheelbarrow and knife.

Timber garden edging: 100x25mm treated pine edging, 50x50mm hardwood pegs, galvanised nails. *Tools:* tape measure, pencil, stringline, saw, hammer and sledge hammer.

Turf: turf, turf underlay. *Tools:* wheelbarrow, spade, rake, topsoil leveller, hedge shears.

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.

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.

Steel arches

Step 1 Mark out post holes and dig to about 1m deep. Place posts into holes and secure in place using rapid set concrete. Ensure posts are vertical.

Step 2 Cut horizontal beams to length using an angle grinder.

Step 3 Erect scaffolding to provide a sturdy and level platform from which to work. Clamp beams to posts at finish heights using timber supports and clamps. Ensure all beams are at the same level using a water level.

Note: Electric arc welding is a highly specialised skill and is potentially very dangerous. Do not attempt structural work like this unless you are already experienced. Always wear full length clothing, leather apron and gloves and welding mask. Do not weld with children in the vicinity and warn others not to look directly at the flash.

Blitz Tipz: Clamp a timber block to the post at the finished level of the bottom edge of the beam as a temporary support. Provide further support to this with a post and



ensure it is held securely with another clamp.

Step 4 Ensure a snug fit between beams and posts and weld joint together. Chip off slag from joint and paint with primer.

Step 5 Cut top of posts off level with top of beam and prime all cut edges. Paint all surfaces with final coat.



Paving



Blitz Tipz: We used Besser 390x194x40mm capping pieces as pavers. They cost around \$1.50 each or \$20/square metre. Available nationwide. Check under 'Building Supplies' in your local Yellow Pages for suppliers in your area.

Step 1 Clear the area to be paved and excavate if required. The excavation depth is calculated as the thickness of the paver (in this case 40mm) plus around 30mm for paving sand, plus 75mm for road base for pedestrian areas. [Note: Use 100mm road base over clays. If you are in doubt about how much road base to use, seek advice from your local landscape professionals.]

Step 2 Mark out area to be paved. Lay road base to about 100mm deep. Compact to approximately 75mm with a vibrating plate compactor.

Step 3 Bring in paving sand and tread into place about 30mm deep. Set up screed rails to 40mm below finished paving level. Screed off paving sand to even surface.

Step 4 Start laying the pavers along the longest straight edge of the area to be paved using a string line to keep them in position. If any of the pavers need to be cut, use a brick saw or angle grinder.

Blitz Tipz: A brick saw can be hired for about \$130 a day.

Step 5 Excavate a 100mm trench around the outside edge of the paved area (unless up against a solid structure) and fill with concrete (follow instructions on bag). Use a brickie's trowel to compact concrete against the side of the pavers taking care not to mound it too high and spoil the look of the paving. Allow to set. This is called a concrete haunch and retains the paving sand in place.

Note: Nigel used rapid set concrete to haunch our paving. Place dry mix along trench. Pull the concrete back from paving with a trowel to create a trough. Pour water into the trough and press the concrete into place with a trowel. Sets in 15 minutes.

Step 6 Sprinkle grouting sand (fine sand) over the paving and sweep to fill the gaps. This sand stabilises the paving by wedging pavers in place.

Blitz Tipz: Grouting sand flows best when completely dry, so sprinkle a layer over the paving and allow to dry before sweeping in.

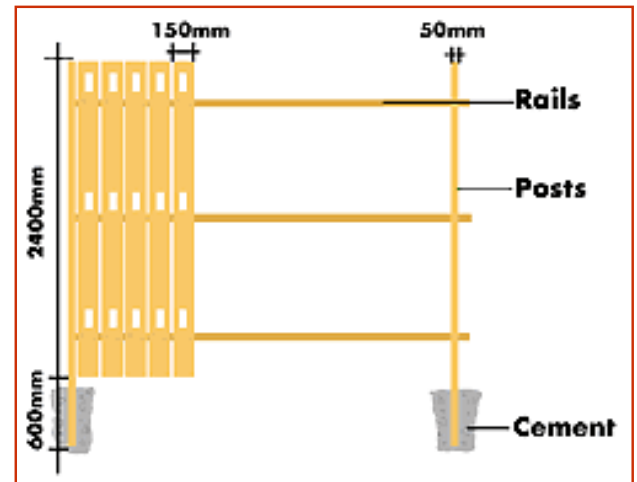
Decorative timber screens

Step 1 Mark out screen location and locate post positions. Dig 600mm deep holes for each post using a post hole shovel or auger.

Step 2 Place the posts into the holes. Make sure your posts face the right way to enable rails to be installed. 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 minutes) it will set in about 15 minutes.

Step 3 Install rails into holes in posts and cut ends flush with the outside edge of the post.

Step 4 Nail routed timber posts to rails like normal fence palings. Nail the broad face of the first post to the rails, ensure it is vertical. Connect the remaining posts to the rails, ensuring the tops are level.



Blitz Tipz : You really need to hire a fencing gun to do jobs like this. They are fast, simple to use and provide minimal disturbance to the posts. They also allow you to work alone. Fencing gun costs about \$75 per day to hire, including compressor and hoses. Nails cost about \$7.50 for 320.

Barbecue surrounds

Step 1 Remove unwanted portions of the barbecue.

Blitz Tipz: Do this carefully using a lump hammer and a bolster. Because the rows of bricks are all interconnected, work along one course of bricks at a time to avoid damaging those parts you wish to retain.

Step 2 Lay extra bricks to build up rear wall.

Step 3 Apply bagging coat to bricks. We used a sponge and a slurry of 6 parts yellow brickies sand, 1 part off-white cement, 1 part lime.

Step 4 Moisten brickwork to be bagged with a fine mist. Apply slurry in long simple strokes with the sponge, being careful not to overwork areas.

Step 5 Allow bagging to dry completely, then paint with final coat.

Pond and fountain

Step 1 Mark out location of pond in paving. Trace shape of pond onto paver surface. Cut the pavers to the required shape using a brick saw or angle grinder.

Blitz Tipz: A brick saw can be hired for about \$130 a day.

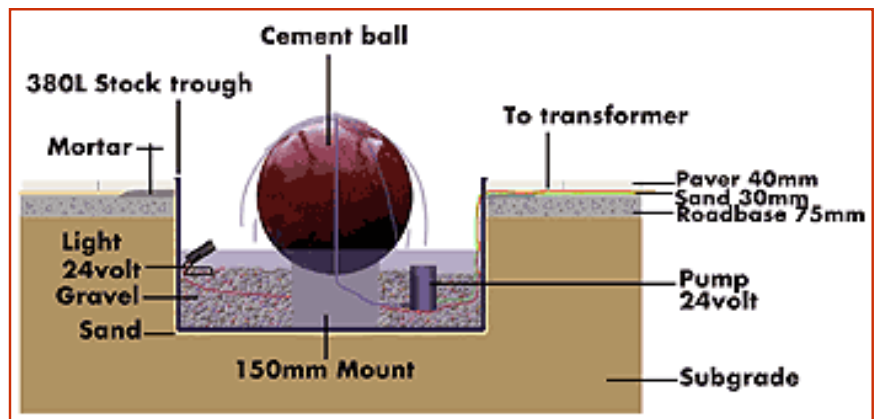
Step 2 Dig hole to required depth, ensuring the top of the pond finishes flush with the pavers.

Step 3 Run low voltage wiring from the pump and light beneath the paving. Place trough in hole, feed wiring through a small hole drilled in the trough and back fill around trough with sand to ensure a snug fit.

Step 4 Lay pavers surrounding pond on a bed of mortar and tamp into place. Insert pump and light into pond, place cement ball onto central mount and run 19mm polypipe from the pump to the outlet on top of the ball. Cut polypipe level with top of ball and glue in place.

Step 5 Backfill around the pump with large river pebbles. Place the light in the base of the pond to highlight the cement ball and connect both the pump and light to the 24 volt supply.

Step 6 Fill with water and switch on the power.



Timber garden edging

Step 1 Set up stringlines to mark out garden edges.

Step 2 Drive in pegs along stringline using a sledge hammer. Use saw to cut pegs off just below finished edge level.

Step 3 Set up edging in place and nail onto pegs. Cut to length where needed, ensuring joints are at pegs.

Blitz Tipz: Use a sledge hammer to support the back of the peg while nailing the edging on.

Garden beds

Step 1 We incorporated a layer of around 200mm of organic compost 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 forest fines mulch) over the garden beds and then water.

Turf

Blitz Tipz: In some areas subsurface drainage may be required prior to turfing. If in doubt, check with your local landscape professionals.

Step 1: 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.

Blitz Tipz:: Turf underlay soil is spread about 100mm (4") thick and costs around \$34 a cubic metre.

Step 2: Roll out the turf starting along the longest straight edge and cutting to shape with hedge shears or spade where required. Roll with a lawn roller and then water well.

Our plants

Canna lily (*Canna x generalis*), tree fuchsia (*Fuchsia arborescens*), heliotrope (*Heliotropium arborescens* 'Plum Pie'), azolla (*azolla pinnata*), kniphofia (*Kniphofia* 'Candlelight'), American cotton palm (*Washingtonia robusta*), pimelea (*Pimelea ferruginea*), soft leaf buffalo (unnamed variety).



pimelea



canna lily



tree fuchsia



heliotrope



American cotton palm



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 \$9756. Considerable savings are possible using smaller plants, reducing the total cost to \$8549.

- Hydor Hydrogarden L30 24V submersible pump and transformer costs around \$180. Rio mini tube light and transformer costs around \$60. Check with your local garden centre for availability of these or equivalent products.
- Cast iron chimenea costs around \$406 and is available nationwide from Barbecues Galore.
- 380litre polypropylene stock trough cost \$179 from Elders Stockmans, Sydney, phone: (02) 9651 1222.
- 500mm diameter cement ball cost \$110 from Cement Mouldings, Sydney, phone: (02) 9997 8935.
- 200x200mm square hollow section (SHS) steel and 200x100mm rectangular hollow section (RHS) steel are available nationwide. Check under 'Metal Merchants' in your local Yellow Pages for suppliers in your area.
- Murobond Murowash Deep Bordeaux, Saffron and Moscow Paints are available from Murobond Coatings, Sydney, phone: (02) 9906 7299. Costs \$117.90 for 10 litres and \$55.75 for 4 litres plus a \$2/litre tint surcharge for the Saffron and Moscow paints.
- Besser 390x194x40mm capping pieces cost around \$1.50 each or \$20/square metre. Available nationwide. Check under 'Building Supplies' in your local Yellow Pages for suppliers in your area.
- 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:

Construction by the Backyard Blitz team.