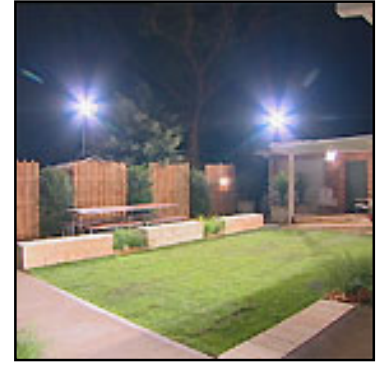


BACKYARD BLITZ

Paralympian's Paradise



Paul Nunnari was involved in a horrific car accident when he was just 11 years old. He fractured his spine and became a paraplegic, confined to a wheelchair for the remainder of his life. Paul became heavily involved in wheelchair sports following his accident and has become an elite wheelchair athlete, representing Australia at the Commonwealth Games, Paralympic Games and World Championships.



Design intent

Matthew Cantwell, from Secret Gardens of Sydney, designed a garden that has good wheelchair access for Paul, and a simple but effective choice of low maintenance plants. Paul loves to entertain friends and family, so an outdoor dining area with plenty of room to sit and relax has been created.

Design ideas

Designing a garden suitable for wheelchairs means gentle slopes and ramps, and enough room for mobility. Low maintenance plants and materials are also a good idea and as with many gardens, a shady spot to sit is always welcome.

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.

Permits and approval: check with your local council regarding regulations about earthworks and drainage. If you are changing existing levels or installing drainage ensure no water run-off is directed toward neighbouring properties. Any water entering the stormwater system must be free from debris and sediment.

Getting started

Virtually everything in the backyard had to be removed, and access through the garage enabled Barnsey to do the majority of the clear out with the bobcat. The shed was relocated by hand to the side of the house and excavation for a new path and footings for seats was begun.

Garden elements

Timber deck: Scott built a 'floating' deck using treated pine timber. No posts or bearers were used as the deck was supported on plastic wedges over an existing concrete slab. Joists (190x45mm) were laid at 450mm centers, and nailed to the plastic wedges beneath. 90mmx19mm treated pine decking boards were nailed down with a 50mm twisted shank, stainless steel nail, fired from the nail gun. A wheelchair ramp was cut into the deck using the same construction technique, and another ramp was built near the back door by combining a range of timber beading around the existing doorway.

Blitz Tipz: The gradient for wheelchair ramps should be no steeper than 1:14.



Block Seats: Nigel built three seats using 190mm x 390mm split face concrete blocks. The seats were laid with a 4:1 mortar mix on a brick footing, to a height of two blocks and then capped with block capping pieces to provide a comfortable bench seat. All excess mortar was cleaned off with a sponge and clean water.

Blitz Tipz: Lightweight structures such as these seats can be built upon a simple brick footing. We used bricks laid on edge into a bed of mortar to provide a solid block of masonry keyed into the ground.

Concrete Paths: Nigel and Greg installed two new concrete paths to give Paul better access around the garden. The paths were formed up using 100mm garden edging nailed to hardwood pegs. The edging was set to the desired finished levels of the paths, which meant they could be used as screed rails when the concrete was poured. Reinforcing steel mesh (F72) supported and held in place with plastic bar chairs adds strength to the job. The mesh was positioned to have a 50mm cover of concrete to ensure no exposure to the elements, eliminating the chance of the steel rusting, or the concrete cracking. Once in place the concrete was screeded, floated with a steel float and edged with an edging tool. Then it was left to go off for a while, given a broom finish for grip and edged one more time.

Blitz Tipz: Concrete is ordered in increments of 0.2m³ with a maximum load in a large truck of 6m³.



Timber Panels: Jamie built some stylish screens, which contrast well with the mature plantings of adjacent escallonia. Treated pine posts (H4, 90mm x 90mm) set vertically in a 600mm deep concrete filled footing, support three horizontal rails (70x50mm) nailed in place. Two sizes of rough sawn pine boards nailed vertically to the rails create an attractive screen.

Blitz Tipz: A 30mm board on edge makes a great spacing tool. Check your vertical boards regularly with a spirit level to ensure they are plumb.



Painting: The existing concrete car space was given a fresh look, with minimal effort. All loose particles and grease were removed with a high pressure cleaner and the concrete allowed to dry overnight. A quick drying paving paint (Berger Jet Dry "Non Slip". Colour- Bare Bracken) was applied with rollers and the team advised all on-site to stay off it!

Blitz Tipz: Ensure that the surface to be painted is free of dust and debris and that it has sufficient time to dry.

Table and Bench Seats: A prefabricated galvanized frame is the basis of a perfect outdoor setting for Paul, his family and friends. Nigel and Greg screwed down 90mm Merbau decking boards to the frames to create a large table and four bench seats.

Blitz Tipz: Pre-drill decking boards to avoid splitting the ends. The boys used self-drilling metal screws with a counter sunk head to bite into the metal frame and the timber tops.

Garden Beds: The existing soil was a clay loam but a little compacted. We added organic garden mix, which Barnsey mixed through with the mini excavator, creating a good, fertile, planting medium. A 75mm layer of woodchip mulch was spread over the garden beds after planting to retain soil moisture and to maintain soil temperature.

Blitz Tipz: Mulching not only looks good, it helps plant health by keeping plant roots cooler in summer and warmer in winter.

Plants

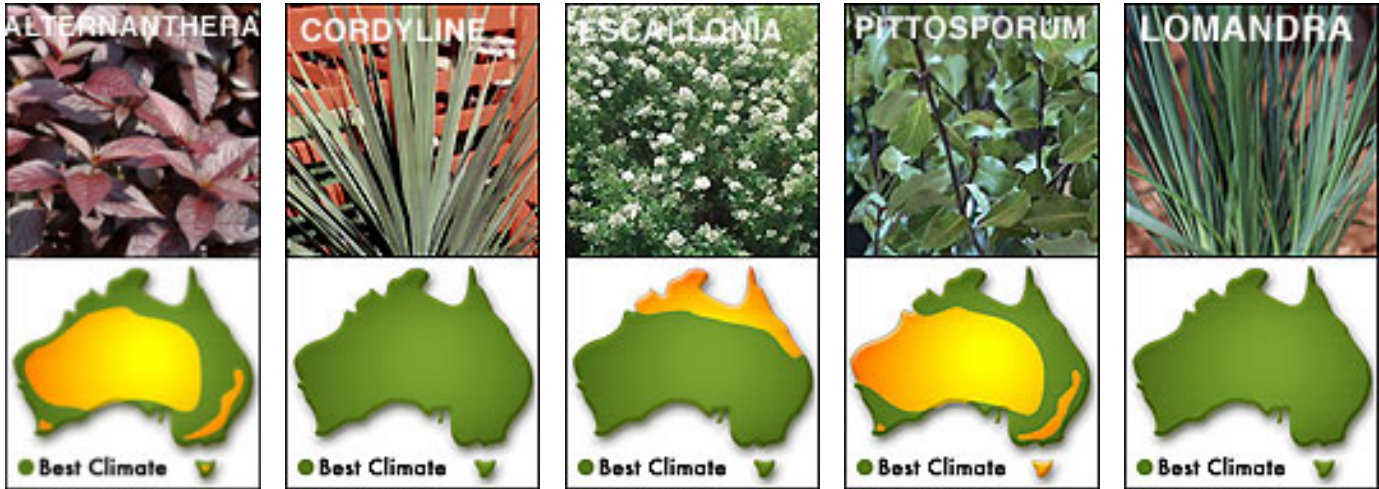
A hardy, low maintenance selection of plants was selected for colour, form and function.

Trees: escallonia (*Escallonia 'Iveyi'*), 'James Stirling' pittosporum (*Pittosporum tenuifolium 'James Stirling'*), New Zealand cabbage tree (*Cordyline australis*).

Shrubs: alternanthera (*Alternanthera dentata*), coast rosemary (*Westringia fruticosa*).

Ornamental grass: lomandra Tanika (*Lomandra longifolia 'Tanika'*).

Succulent: yucca 'Silver Star' (*Yucca elephantipes 'Silver Star'*).



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 \$14,445. The use of smaller plants would reduce the cost to \$9,499.

Product details

- The large reconstituted sandstone pots came from Elegant Garden World in Sydney. Phone (02) 9723 1088 for more details.
- The galvanized table and bench seat frames were made by Franx Engineering Pty. Ltd. near Sydney. (02) 4577 6260.
- Most of the plants we used are readily available at, or can be ordered from nurseries. Nurseries can also advise on similar varieties or substitutions suited to your area. You may need to contact specialist nurseries for some plants. Your local nursery should be able to help.
- Most other materials are available from large hardware stores, building or landscape suppliers.
- All tools used are commonly available for hire.



Acknowledgements

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



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