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Volume 3 • 2008

\$7.99 (Canada \$8.99)



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► **A BEAUTIFUL OUTDOOR OASIS COMES TO LIFE.**
This backyard went from hostile to magnificent with a three-step makeover, which added shelter from the sun, some new hardscaping, and a plethora of plants.



A place in the SUN

A new look, a bit of shade, and a dose of plants turn an unfriendly poolside into the center of activity

The things that landscape architect Jeff Blakely noticed when he first saw the backyard of Jane and Donald Perkins were not good. A potentially beautiful, large swimming pool, essential for most Floridians, was tiled with powder blue bathroom tiles, while the deck surrounding it was a concrete slab, which baked all day in the hot southern sun. There were drainage issues, barely any green spaces to soften the hardscaping, and a bank of windows along the back of the house that allowed the hot sun to pour into the dining room, making it uninhabitable. But Jane and Donald, who live most of the year in Chicago, wanted their part-time Florida residence to be the vacation home of their dreams, so they eagerly enlisted Jeff's help to transform their unfriendly and unsightly backyard pool area into a delightful retreat.

Rather than rip out the entire backyard and start again, Jeff decided that with a little resur-

DON'T START FROM SCRATCH

If your outdoor oasis isn't the entertaining space of your dreams, a complete remodel isn't your only option. Try any of these handy techniques to turn a lackluster space into an open-air wonder.

► RESURFACE

Changing the feel of a space can be as simple as changing the color scheme. By retiling a pool or adding a faux finish to an ugly retaining wall, an entertaining area can be given an entirely different feel, taking the space from outdated to outstanding.

► RETHINK

When an outdoor space isn't being utilized to its potential, think about why your family and friends aren't using it. Building a pool house so that towels are at the fingertips of swimmers or putting in a pathway to make access easier can often increase the activity in a once-ignored spot.

► RECONFIGURE

When seating areas are placed in inconvenient or unfriendly locations, the likelihood of guests actually lingering in a space is not good. Not everyone, for instance, wants to sit right at the edge of the pool. Offer your guests other options. Shifting the position of seating or dining areas will sometimes increase their usage.



▲ A DATED SPACE NEEDS A FACE-LIFT. Ugly concrete hard-scaping, outdated pool-tile colors, no shade, and the absence of a foot-path to the family room were all problems with this space.

facing, a few plants, and a crucial redesign, this space could go from sun scorched to superb.

A new start begins with a fresh look

What should have been a beautiful backyard pool for Jane and Donald was instead a powder blue nightmare. The tiling on the interior of the pool made the water look like a Technicolor version of the Caribbean Sea, a vision the home owners were not pleased with—especially Jane, who is an artist. "Something as simple as changing the tile color can change the entire feel of a pool," Jeff says. "It goes from being an eyesore to the center of activity." He had the blue tiles replaced with darker emerald green and ultramarine ones to provide a sense of deeper, cooler water (photo, pp. 44–45). The resurfacing, although somewhat labor intensive, was far easier than installing an entirely new pool. The new colors gave an ordinary pool new life, transforming it into a tropical lagoon that offers respite from the sun-soaked space.



▲ A NEW LOOK GOES A LONG WAY. What was a grass strip to nowhere is now a clear, defined pebble pathway, which pulls potential bathers outside toward the refreshing waters of the pool.



▲ **PLANTS COOL THINGS DOWN.** An assortment of greenery takes the heat off the hardscape and helps draw people outside with their soothing textures. Taller sun-loving plants provide a bit of filtered shade to the less-heat-tolerant selections below.

The patio surrounding the pool was also resurfaced to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the entire backyard. The old, cracked concrete deck made the area appear dated, so it was torn out. Jeff chose to resurface it with marble to give the patio a more refined look with smoother lines (photo, p. 41). The light color of the surface reflects the light, keeping the temperature of the marble at levels safe for barefoot bathers.

Because the patio and pool constitute the majority of the backyard, resurfacing them had an enormous impact on the area. To be the relaxing getaway Jane and Donald wanted, the space needed, above all, to

be attractive. The darker color of the pool and the completely new patio surface made this space eye-catching and infinitely more inviting.

Soften and shade for greater appeal

As much as the resurfacing did for the area, improving the aesthetics of a space only does so much. If nothing draws you into an area or makes you want to stay there, it is doomed to be unused. The back of Jane and Donald's house faces due west, making it almost uninhabitable from midday on, when the sun is in full force. The glass French doors and windows allowed the sun to stream

12 LUSH PLANTS FOR HOT CONDITIONS

Turning a sun-scalded backyard into an inviting oasis can be easily achieved by adding a dash of green. Finding plants that thrive in the heat, however, can be a daunting task. Fortunately, there are some excellent species that not only tolerate hot conditions but also thrive in them.

1. **BIRD'S-NEST FERN**
(*Asplenium nidus* and cvs., USDA Hardiness Zones 9–11)
2. **'BURLE MARX' PHILODENDRON**
(*Philodendron* 'Burle Marx', Z 11)
3. **CAPE LEADWORT**
(*Plumbago auriculata*, Z 9–11)
4. **CRIMSON PASSIONFLOWER**
(*Passiflora vitifolia*, Z 10–11)
5. **DINNER PLATE ARALIA**
(*Polyscias balfouriana*, Z 10–11)
6. **ELEPHANT'S EAR**
(*Colocasia esculenta* and cvs., Z 8–11)
7. **FLAME VINE**
(*Pyrostegia venusta*, Z 9–11)
8. **LILY OF THE NILE**
(*Agapanthus africanus* and cvs., Z 9–10)
9. **MANGROVE FAN PALM**
(*Licuala spinosa*, Z 10–11)
10. **MAZARI PALM**
(*Nannorrhops ritchieana*, Z 8–11)
11. **'PHYLLIS VAN HEERDEN' RUTTYRUSPOLIA**
(× *Ruttyruspolia* 'Phyllis van Heerden', Z 10–11)
12. **YEW PINE**
(*Podocarpus macrophyllus*, Z 7–10)



into the adjacent dining room and made it feel like an oven by late afternoon. To create a break from the sun, Jeff installed a pergola that is thin and narrow but has enough presence to shade the pool deck and block the sun's rays from cooking the room inside. He then set large ceramic pots filled with confederate jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*, USDA Hardiness Zones 9–10) at the base of the pergola poles so that they will eventually cover the structure and provide even more shade (photo, pp. 38–39). Jeff chose a fragrant plant for this area, anticipating that the sweet smell would lure family and friends from inside the house into the now more appealing pool area.

Another way to make the backyard more inviting was “greening up” the pool area with plants. Prior to the rehabilitation, undersize plantings speckled a sea of concrete. To make the space more of an oasis, Jeff added a screen of tall palms at the edge of the property, masking a harsh concrete wall. Planting beds and a strip of grass installed on either side of the palms created a natural place for seating (photo, right). Thanks to the plantings, this formerly unused spot is now a friendly nook, ideal for sipping tropical drinks while chatting with swimmers in the pool.

Before the transformation, there was no path to the pool from the family-room door. Instead, a grass strip and small hedge took up the space. Jeff turned this into an obvious path with pavers and beach pebbles connecting the most frequently used indoor and outdoor spaces (photo, p. 41). Planting beds with an array of lush greenery softened the hardscape and added some color to the area. The new entryway draws visitors out of the family room and into the backyard.

By simply sprucing up the look and creating some protection from the blistering southern sun, Jeff turned what was a hot, unwelcoming space into a friendlier and frequently used entertainment spot. For Jane and Donald, it is the sunny oasis to which they retreat to escape the cold Chicago winters. ☺



Photos, except where noted: courtesy of Jeff Blakey, p. 43 (#3, 4, 7, 9, and 11); Danielle Sherry



“Greening up”
the pool area
with plants makes
a backyard more inviting.

▲ A PALM-FILLED RETREAT PROVIDES PRIVACY AND PROTECTION. A grove of green softens the poolside, covers a concrete wall, and provides afternoon shade for this seating nook.