



Backyard Oasis

A shimmering pond, a new patio, and a glamorous shed transform this suburban spot



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY
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Like so many great ideas, this local backyard makeover started with a sketch on a napkin.

A Charlottesville couple, frustrated with the lack of storage in their 1900-square-foot basementless home, decided to build a shed in their backyard to address the issue.

They wanted something that would be attractive from their screened-in porch, which overlooks the yard. The couple mentioned the project during dinner one evening with an architect friend, who grabbed a napkin and got to work. Soon after, they had a blueprint for a 10'x10' custom-built cedar shed.

With the shed design in place, the couple realized their entire backyard could stand a facelift. The fence around the perimeter was in need of replacing. Years of kids and dogs running around the sloped, shaded back yard had left the area little more than dirt and moss. A few patches of hardy (and invasive) English ivy were all that had survived. With the children grown and moved out, the homeowners realized they could make the backyard an oasis for themselves to enjoy—gone were the days of caroming soccer balls and trampling feet. Before they knew it, their need to store a few coolers and some gardening tools had become a complete backyard makeover.

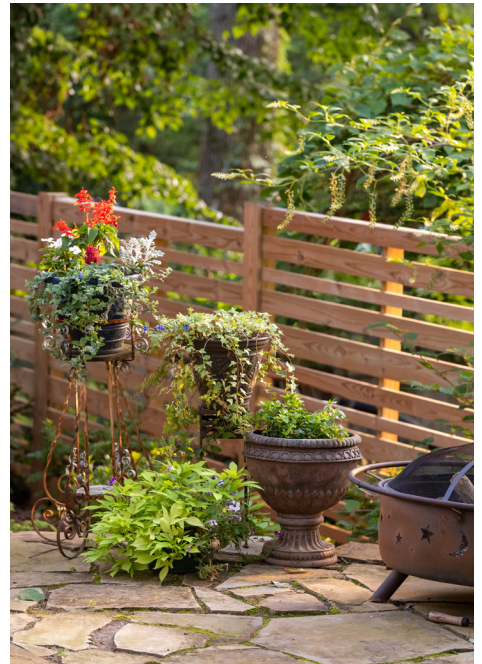
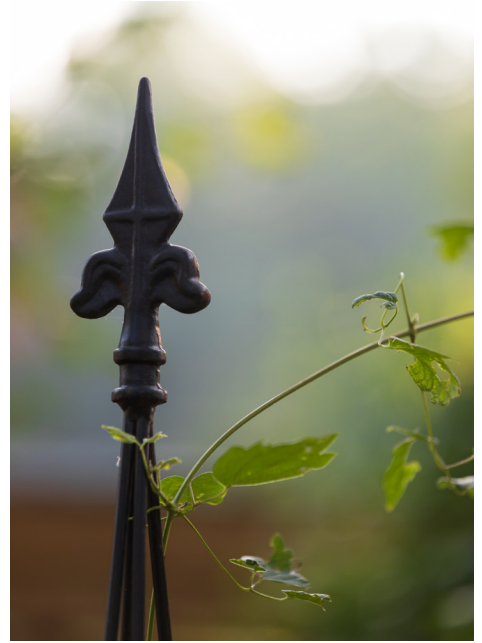
The shed—which, in person, is much more elegant than the word suggests—remains the centerpiece of the project. Situated in a back corner of the yard, the structure has a gabled roof with a large, modern dormer. The form of the roof accents the shed's dramatic antique leaded window, which is centered on the wall just under the raised portion of the roof. The architect, who donated the window to the project, says it had been gathering dust in the basement for some time “and just needed to be used.”

The other windows have just as much charm. Each wall of the shed features an antique, salvaged stained-glass window, which the homeowner has collected over the years, waiting, perhaps, for a moment like this to use them. “It gives it that 1970's pizza place feel,” she jokes.

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The waterfall helps keep water circulating, while snails, frogs, and shubunkins—a silvery cousin of the goldfish—call the pond home.



In this garden, the beauty is in the details. Accents like the shed's elegant leaded window and the patio's carefully chosen plantings come together to create an environment that feels refined and modern without losing the organic beauty of the outdoors.





The renovated backyard is full of nooks and crannies to explore. A natural stone walkway leads to multiple seating areas; formal or casual, morning or evening, there's somewhere perfect to sit back and relax. The gentle sound of the trickling waterfall casts a calm over the whole scene.

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Don't let the glamorous outward appearance fool you, though—it's an extremely functional space. The interior of the shed has electricity (for charging power tools and the like), but it's otherwise not climate controlled or finished in any way. Inside, the interior walls feature lots of hooks and shelves, with coolers of various sizes tucked under a work counter. And if the garden tools hanging around the space are any indication, the couple have plenty of energy for the upkeep the yard now deserves.

The yard is roomy, but it's not huge by any means, and the renovation project shows that it's possible to create beautiful spaces using modest amounts of square footage. Wherever you turn, there's another little nook to investigate.

In an opposite corner, just across the recently installed slate patio, a waterfall trickles into a small pond, another new addition. Built into the retaining wall, the waterfall helps keep water circulating, while snails, frogs and shubunkins—

a silvery cousin of the goldfish—call the pond home. Water lettuce float on the surface of the pond, and submerged planters feature caladiums, creeping jenny, red-veined sorrel, and other colorful plants.

Just beyond the pond, tucked into a corner, is a cleverly crafted second shed. Built in the same horizontal variegated plank pattern as the new fence, this shed fades into the background while camouflaging unattractive back yard necessities like trash cans and offering auxiliary storage for garden tools.

The homeowners have always been entertainers, regularly hosting friends for dinner. They've been able to seamlessly transition from their usual entertaining spot, the screened-in porch, to the new patio, an area more conducive to social distancing.

The patio features several small seating areas. Collapsible café tables and chairs surround a metal dining table. In the center of the space, a lively green chenille-upholstered sofa and chairs are positioned around a low table.

Surrounding the patio are plantings, both native and ornamental, that the homeowner says “will take years to get established.” She admits that she's still figuring out what works well—there's a lot of trial and error. Something planted in the fall that did well all winter might not fare well come July. The heat of the summer has taken its toll on some of the plantings, which she plans on addressing this fall.

There are pleasant surprises, too. The homeowner loves “the moss that's really taken off,” she says, referring to it as one of her favorite things about the overhauled space. Filling in the crevices between stones, the moss spills over onto rocks here and there, softening the lines and adding color to the slate.

With the pond and new plantings attracting more birds and other pollinators, the homeowners have found themselves enjoying their backyard for the first time in years. “It's nice to just sit here and watch it all going on,” she says. “We've become bird watchers.”