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BE A SPORT!

You can use your backyard for more than entertaining if you plan for an active landscape

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Achieving a healthy, active lifestyle is a goal for many people whose lives are habitually busy — from young families to full-time workers to older people. We often lack the time or money to exercise or engage in active hobbies. A solution to this predicament is to have an active outdoor area at home, where you can indulge in hobbies while exercising without having to go anywhere.

The trick is to combine functions in a balanced outdoor space. An active landscape isn't just about having a trampoline and tree house for the kids. It could include fitness equipment, an outdoor gym or simple opportunities to be active in your yard and it can be combined with the other outdoor functional needs such as entertaining areas, storage and clothes drying.

Get the balance right

A balanced active outdoor space combines several functions and has three main benefits. The health aspects of regular exercise and fresh air contribute to general health and wellbeing. A recent study found that outdoor exercise has a better effect on mental wellbeing than indoor exercise. Another benefit is the entertainment factor. Thirdly, an active space at home can save you and your family money on gym fees for everyday exercise.

ACTIVE LANDSCAPES

- **Plants:** dense hedges such as lilly pilly, viburnum or conifers kept trimmed to size; bamboo; soft but tough strappy leafed plants and grasses; plenty of leafy plants to provide oxygen; Buffalo turf in shaded yards, Kikuyu in the sun.
- **Materials:** soft fall; walls, posts and bars that are engineered for weight-bearing; consider neighbours and reduce noise — for example, no steel fences near ball play areas, no timber decks with skates and bikes, no squeaking equipment.

1. Ideal for the active family, a garden with a tennis court and pool. Photo courtesy of Coastal Pools & Spas.

2. If you're going to encourage active sports, provide plenty of shade. Pictured, the Coolaroo Pop Up Gazebo.

3. There are myriad outdoor games, such as Klopp, which you can buy to get the family outside and having fun.



The general principles for designing an active landscape are to allow enough functional space not only for the activity itself, but also for all of the related uses such as storage of equipment, a rest or stretching area in the shade that might include seating and access to drinking water while you're exercising. These functions can be combined within your existing or desired landscape style so it appears as an aesthetically integrated space.

Choosing your activities

Different people are more suited to different sports and activities due to the various body types, skills, preferences, abilities, time and resources available, and location. So which activities could you do at home and how do you set up your backyard to cater for them?

If you're something of a "gym junkie" but would prefer to workout in your own space, an outdoor room or cabana used as a gym room can double as an outdoor entertaining space if the gym equipment is mobile. Small workout gear could be stored under built-in bench seats. The benefit of this is the peace and quiet and a leafy outlook you enjoy while you exercise.

If you prefer to feel the grass beneath your feet, you could create an outdoor "fitness trail" or exercise circuit that makes use of existing features and structures in your garden. For example, a low rail or bench can be used for stretches, pushups and squats; a high bar or tree branch for chin-ups; bench seats for sit-ups; steps for step exercises; and a flat area of grass or rubber soft fall for floor exercises, running or playing with pets.

Getting serious about it

Other backyards could have facilities for competitive or team sports, such as a basketball half-court, a large lawn for cricket or soccer, or a wall for bouncing balls for squash or handball practice. Where space and budget permit, a swimming pool is always a nice exercise option for casual swimming, laps for the more serious fitness swimmer, or a swim spa where space is limited.

Outdoorsy types could incorporate a rock-climbing wall, rope swing or flying fox for

a backyard adrenaline rush. The techies out there might have a lounge and outdoor TV for watching sports or playing Wii or other interactive games. For those who like "no sweat" sports, a putting green, walking track, darts or a giant chess board might be more your pace.

Any type and size of outdoor area can be creatively adapted. In limited space, combine everyday functions with recreational uses. For example, a dining area where the table can be moved aside and equipment set up, or an open exercise area with a removable clothesline.

Think of the benefits

Creating an active landscape may be as simple as installing steps to the yard that are less steep to encourage you to go outdoors more or placing a seat in the shade where you can sit and relax after a walk or jog around the neighbourhood.

A landscape that can encourage people to do more outdoor exercise is an asset in several ways — it can be designed to be beautiful and stylish, while also being a useful space that improves your quality of life and your health. ■

This article was prepared by Jacki Brown and the team at ecodesign on behalf of the Australian Institute of Landscape Designers & Managers (AILDM). If you would like to find an AILDM member in your area, visit the website: www.aildm.com.au.

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