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HOME

Tips From the Pros

by Cameron Huddleston

Here are some things landscape architects and designers suggest you do -- and don't do -- when renovating your backyard.

Before you head down to the local home and garden center or hire a professional to create a backyard paradise for you, consider these suggestions. That way, you'll get the biggest bang for your buck and avoid costly mistakes.

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Do's

- Do less better than try to spread a budget over a lot of features that are halfway done, award-winning landscape architect Jeff Carbo says.
- Do get a design if you're on a limited budget, then prioritize -- go in order of implementation. Start with a patio (because it adds the most value and has the most impact), then irrigation, then landscaping.
- Do work with the environment you have and use native plants because they are less expensive to maintain.
- Do buy quality, even if it means buying less.
- Do buy used swing sets for the kids. New ones cost \$5,000 or more and won't be used that long.
- Do consider installing an automated insect control system. The misting systems work a lot like irrigation systems and can cost several thousand dollars, but Brett Wendell of [HighGrove Partners](#) in Austell, Ga., says they're one of the best investments you can make.

Don'ts

- Don't do anything you don't have the time or money to maintain.
- Don't focus on the backyard before the front, says Jason Cupp, co-founder of design/build, landscape company [Highland Outdoor](#), Olathe, Kan. Create curb appeal first. "If the front of the house doesn't

look good but the back is incredible, [prospective buyers] might not ever get to the back."

- Don't spend money on things you won't use (concrete curbing, lawn ornaments).
- Don't spend a lot of money on landscape lighting. A little goes a long way, and lots of lights require more maintenance and expense.
- Don't overplant, Carbo says. Don't underestimate the value of lawn space with planting on the edges. "People tend to want to fill up spaces," he says. But it's more affordable and easier to maintain if you confine your planting to one area rather than several areas.
- Don't overpave (around pools or pathways). Just pave in areas where people congregate or walk frequently.
- Don't build an outdoor kitchen if you live in a cold environment because you'll be able to use it only one season.

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