

# Summer Home Improvement

## Create a safe & enjoyable backyard play area

Homeowners often aspire to have attractive backyards that look like they belong in a magazine. While these can be picturesque and functional for adults, they may not be entirely practical for homeowners who have young children, especially when the majority of the yard is covered with paving stones or concrete.

When young children are part of a household, homeowners may benefit by designing yards that are both functional and fun. Incorporating safe play areas for kids is one way to unlock the potential of both big and small backyards.

As children run off to enjoy a playground, safety is the last thing on their minds. Kids are most interested in scaling ladders to tree-houses or coasting down slides. That's why adults must take it upon themselves to keep injury prevention in mind.

When considering playground equipment for the yard, parents need to make safety a priority. A safety group in North America advises parents to follow the "5 S's of Playground Safety" — surface, structures, site, supervision and safety.

- **Surface:** Parents should assume that children will fall. To lessen the blow of falls, choose playground equipment with a perimeter of six feet of a softer surface, such as sand, pea gravel, rubber pieces or wood chips. This material should be between six and 12 inches deep.
- **Structure:** The structure of the play equipment should be built from sturdy materials. Pressure-treated lumber was once the standard, but it's not advisable for



Backyard play equipment should be installed with safety in mind for all ages.

kids' playgrounds, as the chemicals used in the lumber can leach and young children may actually bite or pick at the wood. Use cedar or another wood that resists decay. Once the structure is built, inspect it frequently for damage.

- **Site:** Look around the landscape for an ideal place to locate the playset. There should be no obstacles that children can hit while sliding or swinging. Avoid overhanging branches and do not place equipment too close to trees or fencing. Try to keep the set out of direct sunlight, which can make components heat up and scald young bodies.
- **Supervision:** Do not leave

children alone while they are playing. Prevent children from using the playset in an incorrect manner.

- **Safety:** Follow the directions for installation. Make sure all posts are anchored into the ground securely. Railings should be spaced so that children cannot get stuck between them. Check that metal components have not rusted and that there is no additional excessive



wear. Be sure that no tools or other dangerous items are left around the yard.

Backyard playgrounds should be built with safety in mind. Learn the rules of play equipment and yard safety.

## Banish mosquitoes

Time spent in the backyard on spring and summer afternoons and evenings contributes heavily to the popularity of these times of year. Many homeowners go to great lengths to make their outdoor living spaces as luxurious as possible, only to be bothered by uninvited and bothersome guests: mosquitoes.

Mosquito bites may result in severe skin irritation through an allergic reaction to mosquito saliva.

Homeowners can employ several measures to prevent mosquitoes from invading their backyards this spring and summer.

- **Remove standing water.** Stagnant water is an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes, as they can breed in bird baths, pets' water bowls and empty plant pots that collect rain water. Routinely tipping these items and refilling them with fresh water can prevent mosquito infestations, protecting both humans and pets alike.
- **Homeowners may be unknowingly hosting mosquito breeding grounds elsewhere on their properties.** For example, tarps used to cover pools, automobiles or grills that are not tightly secured can fold up, creating pockets where rain water can collect and give mosquitoes somewhere to breed. Mosquitoes also may occupy gutters, so they should be routinely inspected.
- **Keep a well-manicured lawn.** Well-manicured lawns are less likely to be breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Because water plays such a crucial role in the mosquito breeding process, it's necessary that all potential water sources in a yard be removed. Fallen leaves that are not removed and pockets of soil beneath trees and plants can collect rain water or water from lawn sprinklers, which can be just enough for mosquitoes to breed.
- **Use fans.** Consumer Reports tested the efficacy of oscillating pedestal fans to keep mosquitoes from invading decks and patios and found that such fans cut mosquito landings by 45 to 65 percent for those sitting closest to the fans. When hosting backyard barbecues, homeowners can set up several such fans on their decks and patios to keep mosquitoes at bay.

Mosquitoes are unwelcome guests, but homeowners can take steps to increase the likelihood that their properties stay mosquito-free.

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