



STONEGATE GARDENS, LLC

Backyard Bliss

Remember the days when you were a kid and spent every waking moment outside, often dreaming about building a colossal fern and leaf-draped tree house in your own back yard? Well, Swiss Family Robinson fantasies aside, the magic and the mystery of the tree house remains a prominent childhood chapter and represents the theme of modern landscaping today—frivolousness, fun and freedom.

Gorgeous green getaways are being built across the Denver area as landscape companies specialize in creating sanctuaries (or secret hideouts) fit for any King and (Green) Queen. While the idea of creating a luxurious back yard may have once taken a backseat to interior costs and concerns, serenity and renewed vitality can literally be just a stone's throw away out the backdoor.

"With the economy the way it is, people are staying home and focusing on outdoor spaces as an extension of their homes," notes Sandy Haynes owner of Stonegate Gardens in Denver. "People want to feel like

they have a getaway in their own back yard."

In fact, CNN recently reported that in-home entertainment companies (those selling board games, DVD subscriptions and even barbecue grills) have seen a rise in sales as people let their wallets dictate their lifestyle; many families are exchanging extravagant vacations for quality at-home time. And enhancing the home experience might be as simple as giving the back yard a fresh tune-up. For the makeover minimalist, Ms. Haynes suggests adding some simple splurges including a quality table and chairs, lounge, good garden furniture and garden accessories. Another trend with the economy slump is vegetable gardens. As Haynes remarks, "People are growing their own food as it's a great way to save money, it's all organic and it's super healthy." In addition, many families are growing flowers to create their own arrangements and herbs to use for cooking.

However, for Denver residents who are more concerned with achieving a landscape look to rival the (Denver) Botanic Gardens

TIPS FOR CHOOSING A LANDSCAPE COMPANY

(provided by Sandy Haynes, Stonegate Gardens)

- Check and ask to see a design portfolio
- Ask for tons of references and referrals
- Check the Better Business Bureau
- Investigate their working history
- Always sign a contract
- Never give them money without a signed agreement
- Make sure their design style matches your aesthetic

rather than penny pinch, there are many new and hip features that can be added to create a sensational backyard space. "Ponds and water features are always popular," explains Haynes. "They add a sensory element and the noise is soothing."

Julie Hendricksen, designer for Denver-based Covillo Landscape Design, says that landscaping should be an extension of the home—like an outdoor room. To create a lavish environment, Hendricksen recommends using "multi-layered planting beds—

including large shrubs, medium shrubs and smaller perennials." She also asserts that current landscape trends emphasize natural shapes, "plants with no pruning—in their state of natural beauty—the focus is on plant texture and color."

But before going for the gardening gusto and enlisting a landscaping crew, it's important to take some considerations into account. Kristen Sirovatka Fefes, Executive Director of Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado, says the first step is evaluating what you really want in your landscape design. "Shopping for a landscape may not feel as comfortable as checking out the latest kitchen appliance, but it really is the same as shopping for any other major household purchase."

Fefes says that Denver's sunshine is the staple in creating a strong interest in having fun and creative outdoor spaces. "With 300-plus days of sun a year in Colorado, the outdoor living environment can be just as inviting as the inside of your house," she says. "Outdoor entertaining spaces such as sitting areas, kitchen, dining spaces, fire pits and retreats have become very popular in recent years, thanks to our great weather." And luxurious landscapes are taking on a multicultural taste. "With more travel-savvy Americans, it's easy to incorporate foreign flair into your landscape or garden. Think of a formal English landscape, Mediterranean influences or an Asian Zen garden."

And the landscaping process depends on what the project entails. According to Fefes, "Some people hire a landscape designer which could be a couple of meetings," she says. "Other people phase in large projects over several months or even years. Other

landscapes can be done in a week." And cost concerns are crucial to evaluate. "A very general rule of thumb for new landscapes is to budget approximately 10 percent of the price or value of the home. But remember, as with a new home, upgrades can drive up the price tag," notes Fefes.

Regardless of the duration or cost of the project, one the most important aspects of the landscaping process is level of comfort and communication with the chosen landscape company and the designer. The Covillo philosophy is to educate clients so that they can maximize the use of their landscape. "Our company tries to create a relationship with the client based on you, your life....not cookie cutter. We come to a job with no agenda, we try to personalize," says Hendricksen.

Chris Turner, who works as a designer for Designs by Sundown, a landscape architecture and construction company in Englewood with a nursery in Littleton explains, "I believe that it is essential that you feel sincerely comfortable with the company you choose, as well as your designer." He advises remaining in close contact with the designer throughout the creation process to achieve the right results and the desired aesthetic appeal. As Turner emphasizes, "In most cases, you will be working side by side with your designer from conceptual stages of a design, to the end of the project—so trust and reliability are imperative. Building and maintaining that relationship goes a long way, and most of the time, ensures the project will run smoothly from start to finish."

Maybe when all is said and done, there might be enough room in the landscape for the addition of that tree house? **D**

KNOW YOUR NEEDS

Here are some key questions to consider before embarking on a major landscape project, according to Kristen Sirovatka Fefes, Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado.

- Will your yard be mostly viewed from the indoors or lived in?
- Do you need lawn and other areas for kids to play?
- Do you have pets?
- Do you need barriers to create privacy or muffle street noise?
- Will you be entertaining outdoors and need the amenities of an outdoor room?
- Do you want customized elements like a flagstone patio, deck, fire place or water feature?
- Are there specific plants you want just because you love them?
- Do you prefer low-water plants or those requiring less "care and feeding"?
- Do you want a sprinkler system with state-of-the-art water-saving features?

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