

Time Out Kids

Chicago

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2011
ISSUE 10 \$2.99

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DO WITH
THE KIDS

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6
FAB
YARDS

(that we couldn't make out of LEGOS)

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The “WAY TO GO, SPORT!” yard

The chalk-drawn flower patch on the sport court above perfectly encapsulates the blend of athletics and amusement at play in this recently finished remodel. Home to a Ravenswood couple and their kids ages one, three, seven and nine, it has a backyard that’s half hard-surface (for basketball) and half grass (for soccer), designed in tandem by landscape architect Bill Eiserman and Evanston firm Morgante-Wilson Architects, Ltd.

Cooperation extends beyond the fence. “Our neighbors to the south have two boys,” says Mom, “and they have a basketball court as well. We did a door to connect the two yards, so if basketballs go out the kids can run back and forth.”

The “Hansel and Gretel” turret atop a toy-storage building disguised as a garage (above left) was a last-minute addition; a rambling rose garden on one side of the house provides a “whimsical, sort of mystical” space for more imaginative activities. “They’re really into scavenger hunts, adventures and hide-and-seek,” Mom explains. And for quiet time? She escapes to a wraparound, screened-in porch to knit while the kids draw or read.

“The whole house is family- and kid-friendly,” she says. “We lost ourselves.”

Where the grass is greener

Get inspired by six very different outdoor spaces—each designed with kids in mind.

By **Judy Sutton Taylor** and
Zachary Whittenburg

PHOTO: LIZZ SISSON

WANT MORE?

We've got it! Check out timeoutchicagokids.com for more backyard pics and DIY yard ideas.



The EVERY-KID-IN-THE-'HOOD-WANTS-TO-BE-HERE yard

Do you ever wish your neighbors would just... disappear? Eight years after moving into their Bucktown home, Dana and Lyle Berkowitz leapt at the chance to purchase the two-flat next door—so they could knock it down. Landscape architect Thomas Elia helped the couple extend their covered deck into the newly emptied adjacent lot, while leaving enough space open for their 13-year-old son and ten-year-old daughter to run around with the family's three dachshunds. Grass and plantings surround next-generation artificial lawn that's resilient and low-maintenance “without looking like the Astroturf of the past,” says Dana; a sport court hosts tetherball and basketball tournaments with neighbors, alongside a three-hole mini putting green. Elia designed a patio with a fountain and fire pit and, above the garage, there's a trampoline that's netted for safety. “That's the best part,” says Dana. “Everybody loves the trampoline.”



The FUN-FOR-THE-WHOLE-FAMILY yard

“We have friends over a lot,” says the owner of this recently completed Lincoln Park addition and renovation, “and the adults will sit in the outdoor living room while the kids set up the soccer field.” He and his wife, who have a nine-year-old son and 13-year-old daughter, worked with LG Development Group, landscapers Claire and Ryan Kettelkamp, and project manager Krista Petkovsek of Morgante-Wilson Architects Ltd. to create three distinct outdoor spaces. “When you walk from one space to another, it's a completely different feel,” Dad says proudly. The centerpiece of the outdoor “living room” is one of Chicago's first residential green walls, covered with vegetation, and while it provides the grown-ups with a lush hangout, the sight lines are clear to just about every corner of the kids' yard and jungle gym, which is intentionally devoid of plants that could get trampled during playtime.

Everyone has a space they can call their own—although Dad can sometimes be found in the kids' zone, playing catch with his son.

PHOTOS: BOTTOM LEFT AND CENTER, ERICA GANNETT; BOTTOM RIGHT, TONY SOLURI; TOP, NICOLE RADIA



The WAY-COOLER-THAN-A-GOLDFISH-BOWL yard

At the beginning of the summer, the Lakeview family that lives here hosts a “fish launch” for the neighborhood’s kids. Each child announces the name he or she has chosen for a bagged goldfish before cutting the plastic open and adding the little swimmer to the yard’s pond. (“It’s pretty stinkin’ adorable,” says one veteran launch attendee.)

Throughout the season, the fish’s “foster parents” come by to visit their golden charges; with the back wall of the house almost entirely made of glass, they can still keep watch even when it starts to rain. A small waterfall and footbridge add to the yard’s urban-oasis feel, and the house’s owners, avid gardeners, keep its varied plant life happy and healthy.



PHOTOS: BOTTOM, ALLISON WILLIAMS; TOP, NICOLE RADJA

The WHAT-KID-WOULDN'T-LOVE-HIS-OWN-BALCONY? “yard”

Eight-year-old Liam’s parents gave him one of the balconies off the side-by-side 14th-floor condos they own overlooking Edgewater Beach, dubbing it “Liam’s lounge.” “We wanted him to have a space that he could make messy if he needed to that wouldn’t bother us,” says his mom. The bonus: It just happens to have a spectacular view of Lake Michigan. Liam’s dad installed polycarbonate panels to make it a year-round space that was also safe for him to be in unattended. They furnished it with a futon big enough for all three to spend time together relaxing and reading, a few beanbags for propping their feet, and an open storage unit with labeled bins for Liam’s toys. Liam does homework and tinkers with a microscope at a small desk, and often practices guitar and hockey moves out here. In winter, they turn on a small electric fireplace and put down a fake bearskin rug to make it cozy. And when the family throws one of their frequent dinner parties, adults dine on the adjacent balcony while the kids hang out at Liam’s, around a table they bring out for these occasions. In the mornings, Liam’s lounge becomes “Dad’s office” for a few hours—it’s his go-to spot to drink coffee, read the paper and answer e-mails at the start of the day.



The **THEY-FIT-WHAT-INTO-THAT-TINY-SPACE?** yard

Two slides, a couple of swings, a sandbox, a zip line, several climbing structures, a seesaw, a picnic table, an art nook, a comfy seating area, a garden to tend favorite flowers: On paper, the long list of fun backyard features here makes it seem as if it must be on a sprawling suburban lot. But this yard is in Lincoln Square, where husband-and-wife architects literally made the most of every inch of space behind their bungalow, which sits on a 25-by-150-foot lot. The couple took the needs of their whole household into account, including a now 10-year-old girl, eight-year-old boy and the kids' maternal grandmother. They bought a pirate-inspired play structure from a suburban company, and have tricked it out with customized add-ons to suit the kids' changing tastes. "The best part about our backyard is that it's really managed to grow with our kids," says the wife, who notes that it was especially popular with other children on their block when the nearby city play lot was closed for renovations. "They use it well into winter, and what they like most changes every year." Decorations throughout the yard are primarily salvaged finds that give it a warm and eclectic feel. Maintenance is minimal, too—an important factor for this busy family who wants to spend its free time having fun back here. "We add a few annuals each year, but that's about it."

PHOTOS: ERICA GANNETT

