



This Palo Verde Eichler's pool and deck needed new landscaping to make it more cohesive. Tropical plants without thorns or prickles add to the pool-friendly ambiance.

A place to swim

BACKYARD PLANTS CHOSEN TO CO-EXIST WITH POOL

by Carol Blitzer | photos by Adam Pardee

Big trees and backyard swimming pools do not make the best of friends.

Between the disruptive roots that can crack the foundation, falling leaves that can block filters and thorny flowers that can scratch passers-by, the pool behind the Palo Verde Eichler was neither clean nor safe, said Ira Livneh, the Palo Alto landscape designer who took on the challenge of redesigning the space.

Flowers that attract bees weren't exactly an asset next to the pool either, she said.

"Usually I like to save as

much as I can," said Livneh, of Birch Tree Solutions Landscape Design. "but I thought we could do much better."

She started what she called a "landscape teardown" by removing the littering privet trees and keeping some existing Japanese maples. Today princess palms (*Dictyosperma album*) are interspersed with grasses (*Miscanthus sinensis*) and slow-growing Mayten trees (*Maytenus boaria*) next to the fence that surrounds the yard.

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CONGRATULATIONS

TO GIRL SCOUT TROOP 60016 ON THE 'THIS IS THE LAST STRAW' CAMPAIGN!

Together, they approached Palo Alto City Council and received a proclamation to make the month of May, 2018, Plastic Drinking Straw Awareness Month. The girls recruited 37 restaurants to go strawless, and educated four schools on the effects of plastic straws in the environment.



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Visit cityofpaloalto.org/ThisIsTheLastStraw to learn more about the Girl Scout Troop 60016 campaign.



Side-yard planting beds have a lemon tree and other plants with small, colorful blooms. Right: Purple flowers give pops of color. Far right: Succulents overflow ceramic planters.

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Livneh chose the princess palms because “the roots are very gentle and (the trees) do not drop leaves, plus they have a tropical feeling, which I was looking for next to the pool,” Livneh said. She described her design as eclectic, given the little meadow with bright flowers and grasses near the pool, “which could be considered modern,” and maples, geraniums and hydrangeas, which could be considered “more traditional.”

Near the pool, she focused on the practical. She chose plants with no aggressive roots, that don’t drop leaves or flowers, and don’t have thorns or prickles.

At one side of the yard (farther away from the pool) are planting beds full of hot pink salvia, purple Suzanne geraniums, pink Cistus and white Erigeron (mini daisies). Another bed has small purple blooms of verbena

and a lemon tree.

Planters were designed to completely disguise the pool equipment, with Pittosporum tenuifolium ‘Silver Sheen’ (“I love the texture — it’s so gentle and fluffy,” she said) and white geraniums.

Geraniums are bulletproof because they need so little water, they grow in shade or sun, and there are so many kinds — tall, drooping. “It’s a nice family of plants,” Livneh said.

She’s also fond of grasses that come in a variety of shades of green, suggesting that they work well in corners where you want them to “pop.”

Because the homeowners, including the children, like to cook, she created a vegetable bed in a large raised Corten steel box that can be planted with peppers, cilantro and parsley. Other planters hold mint, oregano, basil and sage and a grapevine climbs along the side fence.



Placing the mint in a container was a strategy designed to keep the aggressive plant from spreading all over, she said.

Breaking up the long pathway are asparagus ferns and oak leaf hydrangeas. Two ceramic West Elm planters are overflowing with succulents.

On the shadier side, she chose

Fatsia japonica, a glossy, broad-leaved evergreen, as well as Stipa arundinacea, known as New Zealand wind grass.

When it came to choosing new trees to supplement the older maples, the owners wanted a new version of their neighbor's huge Mayten, she said. "The only bad thing (about Maytens) is they

grow slowly," she said.

"All the plants are relatively low water use," Livneh said, and none can cause the damage that large trees near the pool's foundation could do. **H+G**

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RESOURCES

Landscape Design: Ira Livneh, Birch Tree Solutions, Palo Alto, 650-704-4896, birchtreegardens.com

Contractor: Globus Builders, Inc. 6350 Laurel Canyon Blvd., North Hollywood, 818-760-7100

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