



HELEN YOUNG

Drink or swim

WHAT TO DO WITH AN OLD POOL YOU DON'T WANT?

Not everyone wants a yard with an existing swimming pool, especially if it takes up most of the garden space. But does permanently removing a pool make good economic sense? This was the conundrum faced by the new owners of this terrace house in Sydney's inner-city Paddington, and they chose Steve Warner to come up with a creative solution.

Warner, whose landscape design firm Outhouse has won multiple awards for residential and commercial projects of all sizes, had designed the couple's previous garden on a large suburban block. At their new home, the rear garden measured just 6m x 12m, tucked between the house and the end wall of a two-storey garage/studio off the rear lane.

"The clients didn't see a need for the pool for themselves, but they realised it could be a benefit to make allowance for the pool to be recommissioned in the future," says Warner. So rather than filling it in, he thought outside the box and used

the excavated space to advantage, designing a sunken lounge area. Besides saving on costs, this solution has a couple of great benefits: it creates a change in level that adds interest and intimacy, and it allows uninterrupted views from the house to the main garden sculpture. The piece by Sanne Mestrom was commissioned for the garden, and Warner designed the garden beds around it. Two eastern redbud trees (*Cercis canadensis*) frame the sculpture and provide seasonal change.

The home's owners have an extensive art collection and enjoy supporting up-and-coming artists.



Photography Peter Brennan



THE CHANGE IN LEVEL ADDS INTEREST AND INTIMACY

Clever: and it can be turned back into a pool in the future

They chose the house for its multi-level layout, which provides an unusual amount of wall hanging space. "It's a residential home but it's like an art gallery," says Warner.

The garden needed to act as a backdrop to exhibit a number of sculptural pieces; the owners also wanted something that would be easy to maintain. "We kept the planting simple – it basically provides framing and directional lines," Warner explains. "And because there is a lot of colour throughout the house, we intentionally limited colour in the garden."

He created two different spaces within the garden – the sunken lounge, accessed by wide feature steps, and a dining area linked to the back of the house that includes built-in barbecue, bar fridge and automated pergola. The café style kitchen window opens to allow great connectivity; nearby planter boxes contain herbs and leafy greens. The two spaces are unified by a boundary hedge planting of lillypilly (*Syzygium australe*) that provides privacy, and oversized limestone pavers that visually stretch the garden. Lighting is a key element throughout.

In a change of mood, a colourful vertical garden fills a dead wall space to one side of the kitchen. Warner and the landscape contractor, Simon Munn of Urban Garden Enrichment, created a light box to put around the abstract art piece by Sydney Ball, which is then surrounded by massed bromeliads and anthuriums.

The garden, completed in 2016, won gold and "best in category" at the 2017 awards of the Australian Institute of Landscape Designers and Managers. "The design has brought new life to the space," says Warner. "I'd call it a rendition of minimalist glamour and functionality."

What are your tips for successfully growing tomatoes? I've never managed to get ripe fruit. Am I better off picking early, before the bugs take hold?

Nicole Murphy, Brisbane

In Brisbane you'll do better growing tomatoes in winter, when mild temperatures and lower humidity are optimum for them. Plant into limed, compost-rich soil in March to finish harvesting by October. Smaller tomatoes ripen faster than big ones, and tough-skinned cherry tomatoes are most resistant to fruit fly. Use exclusion fabric to protect fruit from bugs and birds.

How should I care for my new moth orchid? It is my first plant. It's on the kitchen sink where it gets morning sun.

Tamra Josephson, Doonan, Qld

Phalaenopsis orchids like humidity, warmth and bright but indirect light. They rot and die if overwatered, so never let water sit in the saucer, and water only when it begins to dry out. Use a liquid fertiliser for orchids as per the label instructions. The flowers last for months – and when they fall, don't cut the stem down unless it turns brown, as they can form new flowering side shoots if conditions are right.

My new Valencia orange had three lovely fruit. What should I do now? I want to keep it in its big pot, as I'll be moving. I'm on the oceanfront and want to be totally organic.

Sandra Kelly, WA

It can stay in a pot for several years – but it'll only reach its full potential when planted in the ground. Citrus love a sunny spot, protected from wind and salt. They also love regular food and water. Regularly top up the pot with organic compost, and every month use a little certified organic citrus fertiliser (Scotts, Yates and Richgro all have products).



Send your questions to: helenyoungtwig@gmail.com or Helen Young, PO Box 3098, Willoughby North, NSW 2068. Website: helenyoung.com.au. The best question for July wins a Victa Swift-Start Blower/Vac with cruise control function worth \$289. ▶