

Pick your pool

Think in practical terms to make that dream a reality

By Kati Schardl

Have you ever gazed out the window on a blazing summer day and seen the shimmering mirage of a pool, cool and inviting, in your yard?

Making the mirage a reality and creating your own watery oasis is easier than you think — if you start with a good plan and do a little research.

First, consider what you'll be using the pool for and who will be using it. Do you want a pool primarily for exercise and physical fitness? A lap pool in which you swim against a constant current might be your best bet. Lap pools take up very little room and are generally easy to maintain, making them a great option for urban dwellers with limited yard space.

Are you looking for a pool that can serve as a family gathering place for fun and relaxation? A simple design can provide hours of enjoyment, no deep end or diving board required.

Perhaps you want a pool that works as both a place to float your cares away and an accent in the landscape. Let your imagination run free to include mood lighting, water features and lush plantings.

Some people want an old school pool with diving board (which will require a deep end) and maybe even a slide for the young and young at heart. Others want something more contemporary and sleek, an uncluttered modern vessel.

It's all a matter of personal preference, which is why it's a good idea to jot your pool wish list down on paper before sitting down with a contractor to hash out the practical details.

Plan for safety

If children and non-swimming adults will be using the pool, make sure it is fenced and gated so that you control who has access and when.

Once the pool's built, keep equipment such as life rings or safety hooks within easy reach. You can even purchase pool alarms that will be triggered when the pool gate is opened or someone jumps into the water.



Shopping smart

Build the dream

Finding the right contractor to build your pool is essential. It will require some research and will probably entail interviewing more than one pool installer before finding the right fit. A pool is, after all, a custom construction project.

Before you even talk to the first contractor, educate yourself as to what's involved in installing a pool. There are lots of great and informative sites on the Internet. Make notes and jot down questions to ask.

Do you have friends who have pools you envy and enjoy? Ask them about their experience and get their recommendations for pool companies. Then check the contractors'

background and history, and make sure they have all the proper licenses before they start digging in your yard.

You can't shop for a contractor over the phone — any pool builder worth his salt will want to check out the lay of your land before giving you an estimate. Along with that estimate, good contractors also will provide a schematic drawing of what the pool area will look like.

Plan to do a little comparison shopping. If you get three or four good estimates, you should be able to make an informed decision. Too many estimates, though, can lead to confusion.



Extras add to the fun

Spice up your personal oasis with **custom landscaping** and **deck-scaping** that can create cozy nooks for reading, snoozing or contemplating watery frolics from dry land.

Some pool owners like to join the elements of fire and

water by including a **firepit** or **outside fireplace** in the plan, and others get even more ambitious by building **outdoor kitchens or bars** by the pool.

You can brighten up your pool environment with

colored lights and water features such as **fountains, bubblers** and **waterfalls**, or you can add a **hot tub** for those who want to soak the cares of the day away while watching the kids play Marco Polo in the pool.



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