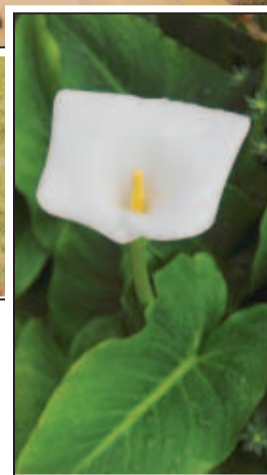


The weather is getting warmer and its time to start enjoying the great outdoors again. Today's back yards are being designed for entertaining, writes VANESSA MASSEY.



Clockwise: Lavender is a colourful inclusion in the garden but needs little maintenance.

John Mahony with his son Ben in the resort-style garden at West Pennant Hills.

The timber deck offers a view of the pool through a glassed fence.

A sandstone wall in the entertainment area, which has a Vergola roof.

Detail of a lily.

A patch of paradise

For John Mahony, the back garden is his favourite part of his West Pennant Hills home.

A mixture of materials and ideas have gone into the design of this resort-style garden designed for outdoor entertaining.

When you see it and learn it was a joint project by his sons Ben, Paul and Mike, you can understand why it is so special.

"When we bought the home in 2005, the backyard was so overgrown you could not see half of it," Mr Mahony said. "We could hardly see the pool and originally I believe the previous owners wanted to put in a half-size tennis court."

However the Mahony brothers, who own a landscaping business called Mahony Landscapes, saw potential in the site

and wanted to create something that would make their father proud.

Ben Mahony, managing director of the business, said the backyard took three months to complete, and included work such as hand cutting a sandstone wall on site for two weeks.

"The first thing we did was bulldoze the whole lot and start from scratch," said Ben.

"Usually when we do our jobs we come into it with a design, but, with working on a budget, we did it step by step, starting with the Vergola-covered entertaining area and gradually made our way up onto the garden, pool and resort-style decking area."

The garden in a big mixture of materials

such as pine, bush rock, washed pebbles, sandstone and timber.

Plants and flowers include gardenias, lavender, magnolias, weeping cherry, mulberries, lilly pilly and New Zealand flax. The main emphasis was to come up with something which made John and his wife Joyce feel like they were in a holiday resort.

The garden offers a flat grassed area, big enough for a game of cricket, while in the right hand corner is the Contemplation Garden, separated by plantings. The pool was updated and includes a glassed fence.

It is not far from the covered entertainment area.

"It is a real Australian lifestyle garden and brings you outside, which is what our

work is all about," Ben said.

Mr Mahony, who is in the process of selling the home, said he and his family had enjoyed many an evening meal in the garden.

"You can easily have a party out here and have several different groups mingling together in different parts of the garden and you would not even feel crowded," Mr Mahony said.

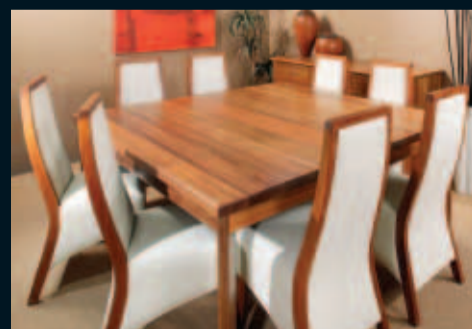
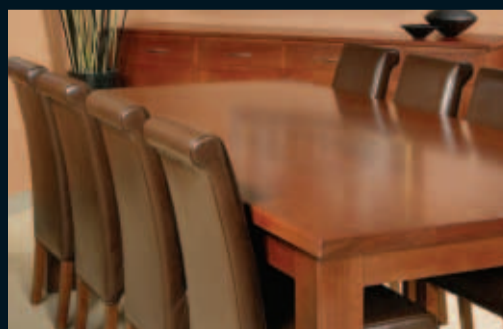
"The main objective overall was to open it up and that has certainly been done.

"If we weren't selling, our next stage was to install a big plasma television overlooking the covered area, which would have been perfect to watch the cricket on during summer."

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