

Create a safe and enjoyable backyard play area

Homeowners often aspire to have attractive backyards that look like they belong in a magazine. While these can be picturesque and functional for adults, they may not be entirely practical for homeowners who have young children, especially when the majority of the yard is covered with paving stones or concrete.

When young children are part of a household, homeowners may benefit by designing yards that are both functional and fun. Incorporating safe play areas for kids is one way to unlock the potential of both big and small backyards.

As children run off to enjoy a playground, safety is the last thing on their minds. Kids are most interested in scaling ladders to treehouses or coasting down slides. That's why adults must take it upon themselves

to keep injury prevention in mind.

SafestPlayground.com indicates that playground-related injuries routinely result in severe fractures, internal injuries, concussions, and dislocations. In the majority of playground injuries to children younger than age 5, the head and face are affected. Children between the ages of 5 and 9 experience more leg and arm injuries than younger kids. The Consumer Product Safety Commission states 70 percent of children's injuries occur on home playgrounds. More than 28,000 children are injured each year on playgrounds across Canada, according to Parachute, a national injury prevention organization.

When considering playground equipment for the yard, parents need to make safety a priority. The Canada Safety Society advises parents to follow the "5 S's of Playground Safety":

Surface, structures, site, supervision, and safety.

- **Surface:** Parents should assume that children will fall. To lessen the blow of falls, choose playground equipment with a perimeter of six feet of a softer surface, such as sand, pea gravel, rubber pieces or wood chips. This material should be between six and 12 inches deep.

- **Structure:** The structure of the play equipment should be built from sturdy materials. Pressure-treated lumber was once the standard, but it's not advisable for kids' playgrounds, as the chemicals used in the lumber can leach and young children may actually bite or pick at the wood. Use cedar or another wood that resists decay. Once the structure is built, inspect it frequently for damage.

- **Site:** Look around the landscape for an ideal place to locate the playset. There should be no obstacles that children

can hit while sliding or swinging. Avoid overhanging branches and do not place equipment too close to trees or fencing. Try to keep the set out of direct sunlight, which can make components heat up and scald young bodies.

- **Supervision:** Do not leave children alone while they are playing. Prevent children from using the playset in an incorrect manner.

- **Safety:** Follow the directions for installation. Make sure all posts are anchored into the ground securely. Railings should be spaced so that children cannot get stuck between them. Check that metal components have not rusted and that there is no additional excessive wear. Be sure that no tools or other dangerous items are left around the yard.

Backyard playgrounds should be built with safety in mind. Learn the rules of play equipment and yard safety.

Make homes safe for pets

Pets require certain comforts to live long and healthy lives. In addition to adequate nutrition, exercise, medical care, and mental stimulation, pets need a safe place to live.

The average home is filled with various items that can be harmful to pets. Just as parents baby-proof their homes when welcoming new children into their families, pet owners can take inventory of potential hazards to pets and take steps to safeguard their pets from home-related injuries. According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, a few simple adjustments around the house can prevent many pet emergencies.

- **Invest in cabinet locks.** Cats and dogs can be curious animals, gaining access to areas of a home pet owners never would have imagined possible. If you can't store everything beyond pets' reach, then use cabinet and drawer latches to prevent access to areas that are off limits. Lock

doors to basements, garages and storage sheds as well.

- **Cover all garbage cans.** Animals have extraordinary senses of smell, and they may be attracted to trash cans around the house. Pets rooting around in the garbage can be messy, but this can also make pets vulnerable to illness. Invest in garbage cans with locks or tight lids to prevent food poisoning or choking.

- **Use medications wisely.** Be mindful of medications, making sure none of your pills fall on the floor where they can be gobbled up by pets.

- **Protect belongings.** Cats can scale many objects in the house, gaining access to areas of the house that dogs cannot reach. Cats also can be attracted to small shiny objects, such as jewelry or glass items, that are choking hazards. Store potential choking hazards out of sight of curious cats.

- **Clean the furnace.** Allergens and poor indoor air quality is

not just a concern for humans. Pets also can be affected by allergies and health issues that result from exposure to mold or dirt in a home. Have your HVAC system routinely serviced and routinely change indoor air filters to maintain healthy air quality. When possible, open windows to let fresh air inside.

- **Secure windows and doors.** Cats and dogs may be distracted by something outdoors and feel compelled to chase after it. Dogs and cats can suffer serious injuries if they fall from windows. Make sure window screens are secure and install guards if your pet likes to hang out by the windows. Exercise caution when entering and leaving your home so pets don't scurry outside.

- **Keep cords and electronic outlets secure.** Teething puppies or curious cats may bite or pull on power cords. Use cord keepers to cover up electric lines and outlet locks to keep plugs where they should be.

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