

'PARTY PATIO' LIVES UP TO ITS NAME



ROY INMAN | SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Shade trees, stone walls and inviting seating turn this backyard into a welcoming space.

Our backyard and patio have been dubbed "the party patio" in our neighborhood. Starting with a barren backyard and a tiny patio, we've worked to transform the yard into an inviting gathering spot without breaking the bank.

Dan Maginn of El Dorado Architects Inc. helped us create a master plan. We wanted a large patio on the same level as the kitchen, a fire pit, green space, shady areas, connection of the yard to the house, lighting, varied seating, and separate kid and adult zones. We also wanted to create a focal point with our vintage Airstream trailer, which we keep parked in the backyard.

There were no trees in the backyard, so the first step to implementing the design was to bring in a huge tree. I mean huge — 25 feet tall. The tree spade seemed to be as large as our house as it pulled into



the driveway. I never thought this was possible, but the addition of a mature tree has added a whole new dimension to the backyard. We used a local company, Instant Shade (www.instantshadetree.com). The cost was less than we had anticipated (from \$650 to \$1,250 planted, depending on the size of the tree and the location), and it made such a difference that my husband decided he needed another.

Low stone walls define spaces and create seating. One wall surrounds a tree, creating a bed filled with native grasses. Another low wall seamlessly wraps from seating to fire pit, making a perfect perch for cozying up to the fire, while separating the green kid zone from the adult patio and blocking errant soccer balls. A low coffee table doubles as a kids picnic table, and benches in front of the fire pit create a gathering spot.

A variety of seating allows guests to pick their favorite spots. I would love a plush set of furniture truly replicating a living room, but that is not in our budget. So a cushy chaise lounge is our only soft

seating. A hammock under the adjacent tree is a wonderful retreat and doubles as a swing.

Some vintage metal furniture rounds out the mix: a rocker left in its wonderful patinaed, rusty state, and two '50s chairs I painted to coordinate with the blues and greens of the chaise fabric.

The trees add shade during the day, making the patio pleasant even on the hottest of days. Trees also create a ceiling, which adds to intimacy and texture. If a large tree is not an option, try adding a pergola (though that could cost more than a large tree) or patio umbrella, or stretch a sail over your space. You could use an actual sail or go to www.coolaroo.com.

A fort anchors one end of the yard, and we left the rest of the stretch beyond the patio open for kids to play soccer, tag or Hula Hoop while adults mingle on the patio. We keep lots of flashlights on hand for flashlight tag, as well as an assortment of balls and jars to catch fireflies, so the kids can entertain themselves. A bucket filled with bottles of bug spray and sunblock is always at the ready.

We love to camp, and when we gather

on the patio, we try to create the atmosphere of the woods. Avoiding glaring lights is one of my main goals. Lights imbedded in the stone walls, in the ground or on the house have shields to reduce glare and bright spots from bare bulbs. We even dim the lights inside the house.

To add a festive touch at parties, we bring out the candles. Votives and hurricanes are scattered, hanging in the trees, set on tables, hung on the perimeter fence, and even set into the birdbath to reflect light in the water. Large, colored Christmas lights were strung for a party, and they added such a playful atmosphere that we never took them down. Now they're on a timer to add cheerfulness to the backyard every evening.

Of course, an Airstream is purely optional. But the shiny surface on ours reflects Christmas lights, candles and firelight, making a perfect backdrop for impromptu concerts, which are a regular happening on our party patio.

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