



Tribune photo by LAURA FRAZIER

Peter and Tara Titus, with their children Claire, 2, and Aidan, 4, browse the exhibits. Many homeowners are revamping their yards while they wait for home sales to rebound

backyard.

"I'd like it to be a tropical oasis, with a waterfall and palm trees. Something that's peaceful," Tammy Morningstar said.

Janet and Tom Novak hoped to pick up ideas for an outdoor kitchen they are working on at their home in Brandon. The couple flipped through photo albums featuring shade structures offered by Dave Hetrick of Exterior Concepts in Tampa.

The Novaks also sought advice on installing a bridge over two koi ponds they built in their backyard. Janet Novak said a surprising design flaw rendered one pond fish-free.

"We built one pond higher than the other, so the fish always jump down to the lower pond," Janet Novak said. "We've kind of given up on it and just keep lily pads in it now."

Kathy and Brian Meyers peered at surface materials, considering which would be best for a patio they plan to construct in their backyard.

The Myerses said they planned to use traditional pavers until they saw a product that mimics natural flagstone on a display table for Oldcastle Coastal, a concrete-products company based in Sarasota.

"It has more character than regular pavers," Kathy Meyers

said. "Plus, you can do uneven borders, and it's not slick when it gets wet."

The couple turned to local landscaper Glenn Givens for advice on no-fuss plants that provide color year-round.

"We like to fish, so we want something that looks nice but is low maintenance," Brian Meyers said.

The landscaper recommended Knock Out roses, a hybrid rose shrub he said is resistant to fungus and bugs, does well in cold weather and provides color all year.

Givens, who has worked in the Brandon area for more than 15 years, said an increasing number of homeowners

Gary's Tips

Gary Alan, creator of HGTV's "Landscaper's Challenge" show, visited an outdoor expo in Valrico on April 19 and offered homeowners tips on whipping their outdoor landscapes into shape. Here's some of his advice:

Make A Plan

Contrary to popular belief, it isn't necessary to have a plan on paper to landscape your yard. However, if you would like to draft a landscape project, take a site plan of your property to a copy center and have it blown up to a size that's easy to work with.

Mark Bed Layouts

Marking bed layouts on your lawn is easy. If you don't have a paint gun, use a garden hose to create shapes for layouts. This will help you decide where to carve out planting beds before removing sod.

Stretch Before You Sow

Just as an athlete stretches before a workout, gardeners must stretch before getting to work. Loose muscles perform better and are less prone to injury and strain. Keep your back as straight as possible, lift with the power of your legs and take breaks as needed.

Remove Sod

The best way to remove sod is with a cutting machine.

Rotary tillers require more work and produce more waste by churning up grass and burying it as deep as 3 inches, creating a mass of trashy soil that must be raked up and hauled away. Sod cutters can be found at most rental centers and require less effort because they remove grass neatly.

Select Plants

New plants were watered at the nursery every day and must be watered immediately after planting. They will need 30 to 60 days to become established in the garden. Water them every day for the first 10 days, every other day the following week, every third day the next week and less as time passes.

Source: www.garyalan.com