

Lesson 1: Do Eight Before you Renovate: 8 Steps to Quick and Inexpensive Backyard Clean-up That Is

If almost 590,000 volunteers can clean up 7,000 communities by picking up 16,000 tonnes of rubbish in one day, [Clean Up Australia Day](#), we can all vastly improve the appearance of our backyards in just a few hours by doing the same. Before you envision your renovated backyard and plan the improvement project, remove all the distracting, uninspiring rubbish and rubble. I'm Matt, Australia's leading expert in transforming backyards from blah to hoorah, and I know well that simply cleaning up is the easiest and most affordable first step in outdoor space transformation. Follow these eight steps to prepare your backyard's creative clean slate by taking the rubbish out the gate!

1. Pick up and dispose of refuse

If every citizen of our country creates one tonne of rubbish each year—which we do—some of it is bound to find its way into our backyards. Maybe the wind blows in plastic bags, a stray dog rolls the rubbish bin over or the previous owner hoarded useless items; no matter how your backyard came to be a bit trashy simple refuse removal is step one. Statistics indicate that as much as seven out of 10 pieces of our rubbish are recyclable and over 90% of the urban communities have kerbside recycling services (as well as trash removal), so sort as you collect and contain both. If you do not have kerbside service, check your local directory for area waste management services that handle both garbage and recyclables.

2. Get rid of that builder's rubble

Over 40 percent of our country's waste that goes into landfills is comprised of construction and demolition material. If you never removed the leftover construction bits and pieces from a room addition, deck-building project or what have you, now is the time. If you have a lot, hire a hippo bin from an area environmental services company; they'll affordably rent it to you and haul it away after you've filled it up. Remember, even this type of rubble can often be recycled, so double-check any wood, stone, paving blocks etc. before you discard them; they may be ideal for landscaping projects down the way. Dispose of any irreparably broken down yard ornaments, furniture, and small structures during this phase of the clean-up as well.

3. Remove oversized junk

Most of our large communities have "cash for cars" programmes in place; these private companies will often pay you a scrap metal price for your junk vehicle and haul it away. You may have to pay someone to remove any old appliances left on the property and make sure any oils, grease or chlorofluorocarbons they contain are disposed of properly. If you have any such items in your yard or shed that are functional, donate them to a charitable organization like [Habitat for Humanity Australia](#); most such groups will pick up the item(s) free of charge.

4. Clear out garden rubbish

Once you've cleared away the inorganic refuse, it's time to grapple with the organic rubble: tree branches, dead plants, and rotting fruit for example. [Zero Waste Australia](#) indicates that of the

38-plus million tonnes of landfill material generated each year, up to 60% is organic material. Check your regional waste management providers for organic waste recycling programmes; in many areas disposal of organic waste at facilities that will compost it for agricultural use is free. If you plan to garden in your renovated backyard, you may want to compost the organic waste yourself; cleanup.org.au circulates a fact sheet with tips and techniques for on-site composting.

5. Pull up and destroy the weeds

Before you weed, go to the Weeds Australia website and identify each of the weeds you find in your backyard. The weeds on the site are divided into categories; if you have weed grasses, for example, you can click on the grasses link to see photos of each grass, identify where it grows and whether it is considered invasive or noxious. If it falls under the latter two labels, contact your regional council office for area disposal information (note: burning the weeds is not a deterrent as most seeds survive surface burns, many even thrive in over-burned soil).

6. Prune and tidy up existing plantings you want to keep

If you have trees, shrubs, vines and other plants that you want to keep in your yard, clean them up too. ABC TV's Gardening Australia site has numerous fact sheets on proper pruning of woody plants and perennials. Start by clipping away all dead plant matter then follow the pruning techniques applicable to your greenery. Always follow the 60-40 rule unless otherwise specified: only prune away up to 40% of any plant, leaving 60% to flourish.

7. Mow the grass, even if it's dead

If you suffered through a drought, are experience water rationing or a previous tenant simply neglected the lawn and it is scraggly and dead-looking, mow it anyway. Chances are it will come back with some water and nitrogen-based fertilizer. Meanwhile, the mowing will make it appear tidy and tended, and also reduce fire hazard. If you have a mulching mower, leave the mulched grass, leaves and twigs on the lawn area; they will hold moisture in the soil and return nutrients to it. Check with your municipal authorities if you suspect there are domestic water use restrictions in place; if there are, consider removing the turf grass altogether and plan to replace it with low water-use plants or some sort of paved or graveled area.

8. Rake and remove leaves , pruning waste and grass clippings

Last but not least, rake up and dispose of all the leaves, twigs, grass stalks, etc. These constitute organic waste and can be composted. Simply removing organic rubble the blows about and piles up in drifts will make your outdoor space look much improved.

Lesson 2 Project:

- If you do not already have kerbside service, investigate your area options.
- Contact your local waste management companies and obtain rates and size information for hippo bins; if you don't need them now, you may need them when you start your renovation.
- Contact local charities if you have anything you think they might be able to use.

- Even if you don't have organic waste, find out how to recycle it locally as you will likely be creating some when you add plantings.
- Investigate local programmes that put at-risk young people to work on clean-up projects. You may find you don't have to do any of it yourself.