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## Backyard refuge on the Boise Bench

### Roger Hankins and Dick Mallea took their time creating an oasis fit for kings

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The backyard of sunbaked grass was almost a blank slate when Roger Hankins and Dick Mallea moved into their home in the Morris Hill neighborhood in 1987.

"We sat out back and thought, 'What do we want to look at?'" Mallea said.

Years passed.

They put a bathtub out back for a year, thinking it could be interesting, but more refined thoughts prevailed.

Hankins was inspired by a trip he had taken as a child to Butchart Gardens in Victoria, British Columbia.

"That was kind of my idea of what would fit in this space," he said.

Butchart Gardens is a 55-acre National Historic Site. Mallea and Hankins' backyard is 1/5 of an acre, but that didn't stop them.

Nothing stopped them.

"We didn't have any money," Hankins said. "We started slow and small. We got everything on sale. We got pieces and parts from friends."

They dug out the grass and excavated the 30-foot-long water feature by hand.

Hankins: "It was really hot."

Mallea: "We broke our backs."

The big push came in 1995 when Mallea's daughter got married and her new husband's family came from Spain for the wedding, along with her pen pal from France.

Mallea and Hankins planted quaking aspen for quick shade and three flowering linden trees, and they hosted a day-after-the-wedding party for 140 people in the garden.

Within the sparkling combination of shade and water sits Mallea's alligator cactus desert. Three stepping stones, set in sand, form the body of the alligator (just visible beyond the heron in the photo at top). The cactus came from the ranch where Mallea grew up in Shoshone.

"I don't want to get rid of it," he said. "It reminds me of my childhood."

Some of the irises and the pink poppies also came from his childhood home.

The koi, which Mallea bought for \$75, came from a pawn shop around the corner that was going out of business. The fish is now 8 years old.

In the spring and fall, the deep end of the pond is covered with nets to protect the fish from a blue heron who stops by.

On the opposite side of the yard, Hankins and Mallea have three raised beds for vegetables.

And it all grows without irrigation. "Three days of hauling the hose around," Hankins said. "But it's worth it."

"There's always work to do, but if you enjoy it, what better way to spend your time," Mallea said. "We'll never be a Butchart Garden, but we can have beauty in our own space."

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