



RENOVATION:
PART FIVE



THE GREAT OUTDOORS

With summer on the horizon, now's the time to look at tidying up the garden and outdoor living areas of your home or rental property, says **Sharon Newey**. Your work will pay dividends in value and rental appeal.

A PROPERTY'S VALUE isn't defined only by what's inside the walls. Great landscaping and outdoor areas can boost the value of your property and make it much more appealing to tenants.

First impressions really do count, whether you're renting or selling, and good outdoor living appeal will also give you happier tenants. Having a clean, tidy and well-maintained property with good street appeal will tell a prospective tenant you are a landlord who cares.

They are not going to expect an elaborately designed and landscaped garden, but the outdoor area still needs to be neat, practical and well-planned.

They'll want the basics – somewhere to sit in the sun or at least outside, somewhere to hang the clothes, park the car and store the rubbish bins.



Offering your tenants a reasonable outdoor living area will always make your property more attractive.

It's well-documented that Kiwis have a love affair with what the real estate adverts call 'good indoor/outdoor flow' and that apartments with even very small terraces or balconies will likely be more popular than ones without.

So offering your tenants a reasonable outdoor living area will always make your property more attractive. Achieving this may mean replacing a window with French or sliding doors to provide better access to the outdoors. It might mean adding a deck or a paved area, tending to the lawns, trimming trees or just providing a few planter boxes.

LOW-MAINTENANCE PLANTING

Although you don't want the garden to look like a lunar landscape, fewer plants means less maintenance. Choose those that are hardy and don't need watering, like natives and succulents. Also look for slower-growing varieties that don't need to be pruned heavily every year.

Avoid climbers, especially on the outside walls of the house. Often they have rampant habits and will quickly create mould and damage the weatherboards. The most invasive may try to migrate inside.

Here's an instant and easy way to dress up and add interest to a bare outdoor area.

Just place a few large planters featuring small yet hardy specimen trees around the perimeter of an outdoor living area. They can also be used to create privacy from neighbours, screen from the wind, shade from the sun or even disguise a less desirable feature such as an ugly drainpipe or an aspect of the view that's not particularly attractive.

PRACTICALITIES

Most rental properties include a clothes drier alongside the washing machine these days. But many tenants still like somewhere to dry their clothes naturally outside when the sun is shining. There are many options to choose from, depending on space. Not many properties have gardens big enough for the traditional rotary clothesline, but there's usually an exterior wall that catches the sun where you can attach a discreet single folding frame that pulls out or folds down when not in use. They take up only a couple of metres when extended.

For small gardens or courtyards, an extendable line which pulls out and attaches via tension wires to a post is a great idea. Other options well-suited for apartments include single retractable cord lines that affix to exterior walls and freestanding portable units that can fold down and be stashed in a cupboard.

MANY SPECIALLY FORMULATED HOUSE-WASHING PRODUCTS ARE AVAILABLE FROM PAINT AND HARDWARE SHOPS THAT KEEP YOUR HOUSE CLEAN AND EXTEND THE LIFE OF YOUR PAINT AS WELL.



Rubbish is a fact of life in any household. Tenants need a utility area to park wheelie bins, recycling bins or rubbish bags, and keep waste tidy and hidden from sight. Prepare a dedicated site that's handy to the kitchen, yet away from living areas where people can't breathe in unpleasant rubbish smells. Bins should sit on a stable, solid surface, preferably in an enclosed area behind a fence or gate with a path that makes it easy to transport them to the road-front for collection day.

Good outdoor lighting is essential for safety and security at night. Tenants and their guests must be able to see their way around the house as they come and go when it's dark. Front and back-door entries should be well-lit, and dark paths and driveways should feature low-voltage lighting as well. Sensor lights that come on with movement are a good safety feature that can deter intruders and make walking through the property feel safer at night particularly for women living on their own.

There are abundant attractive lighting ideas which can add atmosphere to extend the use of outdoor living areas. To boost the value of your property, uplights, downlights or spotlights can be trained on trees or landscape features to create interest or mood.

Not every home has space for tenants' cars or vehicles. But a property with a



secure car parking area or garaging will make your renter a lot more desirable than one where tenants have to leave their cars sitting vulnerable on the roadside.

ON THE FENCE

Many tenants, especially those with children or pets, look for properties that are fenced for safety and security reasons. There are abundant options – concrete, brick, plaster, timber, oriental screens, iron – but you should select affordable fencing which suits the style and vintage of the house it surrounds so as not to look out of place.

Although there is an initial cost involved, consider replacing any boundary hedges with fences, as these will look better for longer, and don't need as regular maintenance. Hedges are also not as secure as a fence.

DECK INSPIRATION

Decks are relatively easy to build, but before you start, make sure you contact your local council to see if your proposed design is an acceptable solution for compliance.



Or maybe the area is easily concreted or paved. Concrete and tarmac are easy to maintain. They won't warp or rot and they stand up to the harshest of weather conditions.

Unlike pavers, they don't let weeds growth through the cracks (although if the pavers are set into a cement base rather than compacted gravel, this won't happen).

Top, left and right: Grassing or paving around the house will tidy up neglected spaces. Above: Outdoor 'rooms' can extend the space of a smallish living space, boosting a property's resale value.

Periodic cleaning will extend the service life of concrete or tarmac.

If the area is level, cost-effective concrete pavers can be laid on a compacted base course or on a concrete base for a firmer surface. Or you could use the cheapest option of all, chip or pebbles. Lay weed-mat underneath or the area will look very scruffy very quickly, and use a decent edging to stop the pebbles wandering. Chip (gravel) is easier to walk on and put furniture on than rounded pebbles, but you can always insert large

MAINTENANCE

Moss and mould are common in New Zealand's humid climate. When they are allowed to grow on a building, they hold in moisture and then transfer that moisture to the cladding material. Many specially formulated house-washing products are available from paint and hardware shops that keep your house clean and extend the life of your paint as well. For example, Resene Moss & Mould Killer kills most common moulds and fungus in just 48 hours.

MANY TENANTS STILL LIKE SOMEWHERE TO DRY THEIR CLOTHES NATURALLY OUTSIDE WHEN THE SUN IS SHINING.

concrete pavers as stepping stones if the area is a high-traffic thoroughfare. White lime chip looks quite contemporary and also reflects light and sun into the interior of a property.

Gobi Block is a heavy duty paved surface that's ideal for parking areas or driveways. It has an attractive semi-grassed look, but it can become unsightly if the weeds start to grow through.

Regular cleaning is a must to keep all areas free from mould or algae, and make them safe and non-slippery. Paths and decks should be treated to an annual water-blast or you can apply a leave-on treatment such as Resene Deep Clean to keep them free from moss, mould, algae and lichen. You could also paint decks and paths with specially gritted preparations, like Resene Non-Skid Deck & Path, in a range of colours.

Outdoor maintenance can be an ambiguous area when it comes to dividing responsibilities between landlords and tenants. Make sure you specify who is responsible, for example, for mowing the lawns and keeping shrubs and trees trimmed. If the tenants show a genuine interest in becoming involved, draw up a contract to ensure they take ownership of the task. You'll need to compensate them by reducing their rent to add an incentive so they'll stick to the job.

Chances are the tenants won't want to bother with maintaining the grounds. In this case, it's best to employ a professional lawn-mower or gardener to look after the property on a regular basis. Ask around the neighbourhood for references. There is bound to be a preferred tradesperson who visits the area regularly who can be relied on to get the job done.

As with the interiors of a rental property, tenants are more likely to take pride in a home that looks good – both inside and out. If it looks good, you'll attract a better quality tenant who will then take better care of it, making your job as a landlord that much easier and more enjoyable. ■