

Before you build, borrow a little hindsight.

A few friendly pointers for a backyard you will love living in.

Start with your Saturday. Cooking? Swimming? Doing absolutely nothing? Pick your three favorite ways to spend time outside. Build around those.

1 Stand there at dinner time.

That perfect grill spot might get blasted by evening sun. Check it when you will cook. Do the same for seating; shade changes with the seasons. Have your installer confirm safe grill placement, clearances and ventilation before adding overhead shade.

2 Pull the chairs out. Seriously.

Outline the patio with a garden hose. Set out chairs, pull them back and walk behind them carrying an imaginary plate of burgers. Check gates, fridge doors and the route from the house to the pool, too.

3 Three grills. Nowhere to put the plate.

Leave useful counter space for prep and serving before adding another appliance. Picture dinner from start to cleanup: food, utensils, trash. Ask how someone will reach shutoffs and replace built-in equipment later.

4 Rain needs an exit plan.

Take photos of puddles and downspout runoff before construction. Ask: **"Where will water go afterward, and who handles the whole-yard drainage plan?"** A drain on a drawing is only part of the answer.

5 Future you has pool toys. And cushions.

Give the everyday stuff a home. Ask what each feature needs for cleaning, service and seasonal care. Planning a later kitchen or lighting? Mention it now, before finished surfaces make changes harder.

KEEP THIS HANDY / Save it with your yard photos. Bring it to contractor conversations.

The pool is finished. But is the backyard?

Sod, sprinklers, landscaping and fence repairs may be separate. Ask first.

Pretty picture. What is actually included?

Ask your contractor to mark the rendering: included, optional or illustrative.

Those plants, lights and lounge chairs may just be part of the picture.

THE "WHO HANDLES THIS?" CHECK

Write: included, separate or not needed. Add who handles it.

Permits, inspections and applicable HOA approvals

Drainage, ground reshaping and retaining work

Electrical, gas, water and utility changes

Pool barriers, gates and required safety features

Decking, paths, steps and seating space

Access route, fence removal and replacement

Irrigation repairs, soil, sod and landscaping

Debris removal and affected-area restoration

Not mentioned? Ask. It does not mean included.

The excavator does not tiptoe.

Walk the equipment route together. Photograph it.
Agree on protection, storage areas and restoration.
Plan secure space for kids and pets, and ask who
sends updates when the schedule changes.

Several companies? One big question.

"Who coordinates the pool, patio, drainage and
landscaping?"

Name the main contact and confirm who resolves
conflicts between the different parts of the project.

Leave room for the rest of the backyard.

A little planning now leaves more room to enjoy it later.

YOUR WHOLE-PROJECT MONEY CHECK

Use written quotes. Count each item once. Unknown = needs a quote, not zero.

Selected contractor scope	
Necessary work quoted separately	
Restoration, furniture and finishing touches	
Reserve for unresolved site conditions	
TOTAL PROJECT TARGET	

Ask what is fixed, what is an allowance for selections, and what could change.

Your savings shortcut (Use a calculator, then enter your answer.)

Target - project savings = amount still needed.

Amount still needed / months until your goal = monthly savings target.

Keep emergency savings separate. Recheck quotes before committing.

Make room for the monthly stuff, too.

Ask about upkeep, utilities and insurance changes. Financing? Compare APR, fees, term and total repayment, not just the payment. Check promotional terms; deferred interest can surprise you. Home-secured borrowing puts your home at risk if you cannot repay.

A FEW CHECKS BEFORE YOU SAY YES

- ☐ Promises, exclusions and written approval of changes are clear.
- ☐ Applicable licensing, insurance and similar-project references checked.
- ☐ Payment milestones, restoration, safety and final handoff agreed.

Pause for pressure to sign now, pay everything upfront or skip written details.

Plan with O&E.; Your contractor confirms site-specific design, requirements and pricing.

Planning

Hiring

Pool safety

Borrowing