

How to plan a backyard vacation

TurfMutt Foundation

Make a backyard staycation plan. Put together a gentle schedule with a mixture of activities that your family will enjoy, such as dining, camping and games. Add a theme for the week, day or evening. A luau theme can be carried through with costumes, food and activities. A sports theme can have everyone in team jerseys and doing sports activities. Use creative names for meals and activities to spice things up. Even if you don't have a pool, children's water play misters or sprinklers can help everyone cool off in the backyard (provided your area is not under drought conditions).

Map where activities will occur in the yard. A lawn area may be the site of soccer, bocce ball or croquet, but it can also double as an overnight camping zone for the kids in a family tent. The fire pit can be used for roasting hot dogs for lunch or s'mores at night. Crafts, potting plants, and eating can happen at a picnic or dining table.

Assess what you have and consider their creative uses. Lounge chairs, sports and play equipment can be used for their original purposes, but they can also become part of an amazing obstacle course. The wheelbarrow used for gardening and yard work can become part of a family field day. The playset your children adore can become a fun breakfast spot or reading area.

Spruce up your yard. Mow the lawn and trim the bushes. Tidy overgrown areas. Add flowering plants and rearrange planters for visual appeal. Put delicate flowers in pots and out of the way of foot traffic. Now may be the time to add a picnic table, a badminton net or croquet course, planters, patio, grill, fire pit, or pergola to your backyard.

Organize for fun. Identify zones for different activities. Dining, lounging and reading may be best in shady spots. Sports, family yard games and tossing a ball to your dog may be better on a lawn that can handle rough and tumble play. Hammocks, lawn chairs, swings, picnic blankets and air mattresses can all provide a place for people to sit down and cool off.

Use the opportunity to learn about backyard wildlife and nature. Ask kids to take an inventory of the many birds, butterflies and other wildlife they see, looking up their species and background. Put up a bird feeder or plant a butterfly garden, as well as potted flowering plants to support birds and pollinators. Add wind chimes, rain collectors, or backyard thermometers and wind gauges to help kids observe science in action. (Visit TurfMutt.com for a variety of backyard lesson plans that are free and STEM-aligned.)

Design new games incorporating your green space. Hold a nature scavenger hunt that's both fun, educational and tests your family's observational skills. Create an outdoor movie theatre by bringing laptops outside or use a projector to show films on a sheet or screen that is hung outside.

Build anticipation. Talk about your backyard staycation in advance with your family and review your plans. Count down the days to build excitement about spending time together in your family yard.

For more information and tips about living landscapes and backyard learning visit www.TurfMutt.com.