

# ? functional pizazz

*I would appreciate some ideas for adding oomph as well as function to my outdoor spaces.*



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One of the easiest and least expensive ways to personalize a garden or outdoor space is to hunt garage sales, salvage yards, garden centers and even discount department stores for interesting items, and then think outside the box. Items such as wastebaskets, bowls and large canisters can be turned into appealing vessels for potted plants.

Finding new uses for found objects goes beyond containers. For example, a client gave me an arched iron frame that once supported an awning. I anchored the frame upside down to an exterior wall and used it as a base for a potting bench. Vines have been trained up the framework of the arch.

Following are more ideas for adding functional pizazz to your outdoor spaces:

- Eyesores such as water and electrical meters, irrigation and lighting timers, and pool equipment are easy to disguise. A service gate or screen can be fashioned from ocotillo branches, thin rebar, perforated galvanized metal or even bamboo canes. I installed corrugated galvanized panels in a staggered fashion for one client who wanted to block views to a neighboring home yet maintain mountain views. The result was artistic and functional. I've also created living walls to help shape a garden space. For a small courtyard, I planted a row of ocotillo and then alternated plantings of bougainvillea on either side and wove the vine's branches up through the ocotillo. Use your

imagination, choose a material that complements the style of your home, and be sure not to hamper access to equipment.

- *Bancos*, or built-in seat walls (pictured), serve a variety of purposes. They provide extra seating, and can be used to create elevation changes, define outdoor areas, or add visual weight. Doors can be built into the *banco* to provide storage for pool toys, potting soil, tools and more.

- If narrow planting spaces between houses and walkways are a problem, create a "sculpture" on the wall with mesquite branches, yucca spears, bamboo canes or any other interesting linear objects tied together with black wire or strips of leather. Add punch to a wall with a grouping of hand-painted tiles, ethnic masks or small shelves displaying unusual objects.

- Boulders add dimension to a landscape. A large, flat boulder makes an ideal diving platform at pool's edge, or can serve as a natural bench near a water feature.

Adding interest and function to your outdoor spaces doesn't have to involve a complete overhaul. It can be as easy as checking out your garage, storage closet and garden shed, and imagining how those gnarly old branches from the tree you had thinned would look placed artistically on the roof of your covered patio. 🌿

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