

Tree stumps step in as side tables; a blue cloth planter brings an added splash of color to the setting.

beat the heat

A Texas couple transform their backyard into an eco-friendly oasis with smart ideas that save money, time, and resources.

BY SHARON OVERTON | PHOTOS KRITSADA | PRODUCED BY DENISE GEE

“Urban oasis” is no exaggeration when it comes to Brianne and Trey Denton’s Dallas backyard. This young, creative couple turned their yard into an island of serenity, sustenance, and sustainability.



The Dentons, *above*, turned a swath of lawn into a patio using crushed limestone as hardscape. There’s no watering, and upkeep couldn’t be easier.

A granite bench, *right*, has a cutout that’s ideal for growing succulents, which require almost no soil or water.

Bengal Tiger cannas, spiky agaves, and heat-loving annuals, *opposite*, convey a lush, tropical look. Metal roof panels put a modern twist on the privacy fence.

Colorful water lilies, chickens, honeybees, and a veggie garden give a look of abundance. But the couple made it happen without draining their bank account or the area’s scarce water supplies.

Trey, a landscaper who specializes in water features, and Brianne, a floral designer, saved money by doing the work themselves. They installed a fence made from galvanized panels, which costs about the same as a wood fence but won’t rot. A care-free lotus pond and a chicken coop add sustainable style.

To keep water bills low and provide year-round irrigation, Trey installed a rainwater collection system that channels runoff from their roof into a 1,200-gallon tank. They bought the rainwater tank secondhand for \$300 and figure it has already paid for itself in lower water bills. They also replaced a third of their lawn with low-maintenance gravel.

Using resources wisely has been great for their budget, but they’re even more satisfied with the bigger rewards. “It’s just the right thing to do,” Trey says.





AT HOME WITH Brianne and
Trey Denton, Dallas

DAY JOBS Designers at Blue
Lotus Floral Designs (Brianne)
and Blue Lotus Gardens (Trey)

STYLE Eclectic. "The
vibe reflects places we've
been in the Caribbean and
Indonesia," Brianne says.

BEST ADVICE "Be patient,"
Brianne advises. "You don't
need to finish your yard all at
once. Enjoy the process."

A woman with long brown hair, wearing an orange short-sleeved top and white shorts, stands in front of a rustic wooden chicken coop. She is smiling and holding a yellow chicken. The coop is made of wood and wire mesh. In the foreground, several other chickens are visible on a gravel surface. A large white letter 'L' and a blue letter 'O' are on the ground. The background shows green foliage.

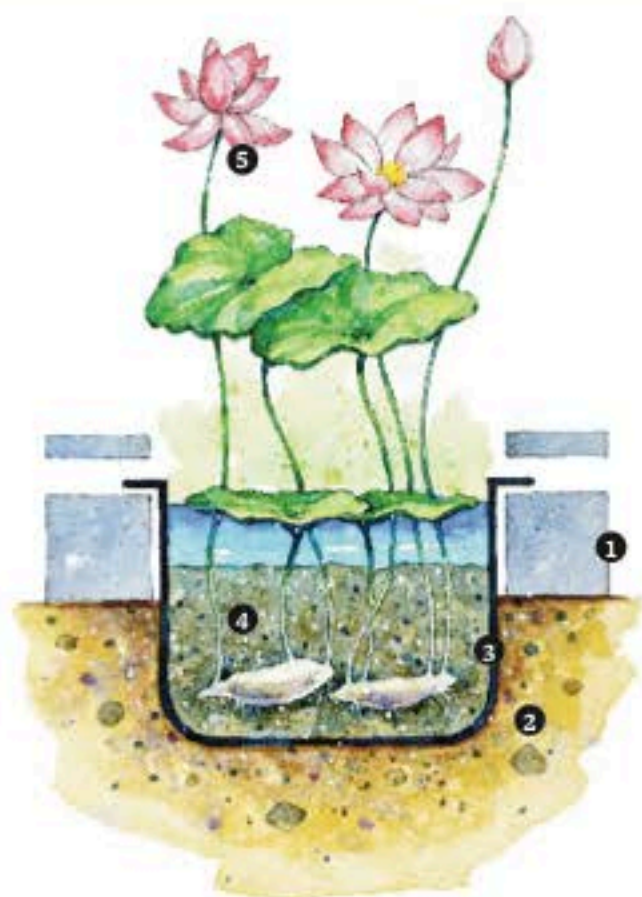
“The chickens are very tame and part of our family. Buffy comes right up to me for a visit when I let her out of the coop.”

Brianne Denton

The chicken coop was built using wood salvaged from a friend's garage and a door the couple found at a flea market. The Dentons keep five chickens, which produce 3-5 eggs per day. Old straw from the coop is spread over vegetable beds to conserve moisture and fertilize the plants.



IT'S A POND!
Lotuses are hardy to Zone 5 or colder. Just trim off the dead stalks in winter.



Lotus pond on a dime

Trey's showpiece water feature, *above*, thrives without pumps or filters. Here's how he built it:

- 1. ESTABLISH THE EDGE** Outline the shape of the pond with 8×8×16-inch concrete blocks.
- 2. EXCAVATE** Dig out the area within the blocks to a depth of 12 inches.
- 3. INSTALL A LINER** Cover the pond bottom with a rubber liner, extending the top edges over the concrete edge blocks. Then lay another course of thin cap blocks to secure the liner.
- 4. FILL THE POND** Put the excavated soil back into the hole. Plant lotus tubers in the soil, then fill with water to about 6 inches above the soil.
- 5. ENJOY** Trey stocked the pond with minnow-like *Gambusia* fish to eat mosquito larvae, and snails for algae control. All he has to do is keep the water topped off! ■