



**NORTHWOODS >**

An Edina back yard is designed to resemble the serene landscape of Northern Minnesota.

## Trend Report

“With the rising cost of lakeshore property and higher gasoline prices, making your back yard your own oasis is becoming more popular than ever,” says Gail Schaal, promotional coordinator for Hedberg Landscape & Masonry Supplies. “People can develop their back yards as their own personal mini-resort.” Here’s how:

**KITCHENS:** Outdoor kitchens—complete with a sink, refrigerator, grill and cupboards—are perfect for social gatherings in the warmer months.

**FIREPLACES:** Spend a night in front of the fire outdoors with luxurious fireplaces decked out in ceramic, marble and granite accents.

**TIKI BARS AND HUTS:** Forget the airplane and let your back yard become a tropical haven with this fun patio alternative to a simple picnic table or lawn chairs.

**SPORTING COURT:** You might not have room for a tennis or basketball court, but many people have jumped on the bocce ball wagon, creating professional courts in their yards.

**WATER ELEMENTS:** No need for an entire pond—Aquascape Consumer Products, found at Hedberg, offers fountains.—AM



**PLAY TIME >** Todd Lehman of CRE8PLAY designed part of the play area at the Edina Aquatic Center.

“People are fascinated with the idea of having a backyard riding train,” says Mark Strobel, vice president and national sales manager of The Great American Train Company. “For families, this is a hobby quite unlike most others.”

Though there are none currently set up in Edina, the company has installed trains in three communities throughout the metro. In order to build this type of train, one must have an acre or more of land available and upwards of \$18,000 to purchase the complete Train Starter Package.

As one might predict, a backyard train offers an activity for the entire family to enjoy.

## NATURALLY FUN

As a kid, climbing through trees, hopping across boulders and building forts was more exciting than playing at the nearest playground, says Todd Lehman, who grew up to create and own a playground company, CRE8PLAY ([www.cre8play.com](http://www.cre8play.com)), which builds custom-themed play environments.

As a certified playground safety inspector, Lehman opened CRE8PLAY in 2006 as the only company marketing and building 3-D-themed play equipment for indoor and outdoor play areas. Lehman has built many structures in the metro, including the Edina Aquatic Center play area.

Most of the company’s playgrounds have been for commercial use, but Lehman is currently working with a client to build a backyard playground near Napa, Calif.

Lehman and his wife, Debi, have three children who are no doubt a great inspiration for his playground art. “I feel I have an important role to play shaping [children’s] development and transporting them from their everyday lives to a more creative, exciting environment,” he says. **E**

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# Go Big

Three ways to upgrade the fun in your yard

BY AMANDA MARTEL AND CHELSEA FRANKE-BYRNE

Summer gives homeowners the perfect opportunity to spruce up their yard. Whether you are looking for tips on transforming your back yard into a north woods oasis or adding a bit of fun with an imaginative playground or railroad track, your warm-weather project is sure to be a big hit.

## UP NORTH

If gas prices have you scrapping plans to go up north this summer, consider upgrading your Edina back yard into the perfect northern Minnesota hideaway. With a few carefully placed elements, such as a fire pit, waterfall and

shade-tolerant plantings, along with the already-existing trees, one Edina home was transformed into a wooded escape.

“The preservation of the larger trees in the back yard ... that was important,” says Bob Renaud, landscape designer at Southview Design ([www.southviewdesign.com](http://www.southviewdesign.com)), who worked on the Edina project. Amongst the trees, the hosta, chokeberries and deciduous azaleas add to the woodland back yard.

The fire pit, built right into the patio, is the perfect place to enjoy a summer evening, relaxing while telling campfire stories or roasting marshmallows. The stone walls around the patio, which double as seats, were built without mortar, giving them a more natural look—as if they were formed, not built. “The most important feature of the wall is ... it is full solid all the way through,” Renaud says. This look is sturdy and different from other landscapes.

No Minnesota vacation is complete without water nearby, and this yard doesn’t disappoint. A pond-less waterfall in the front yard adds to the feel. The beauty of cascading water along with the peaceful tones of the water’s movement as it falls into the underground reservoir is sure to add an upgrade to any space.

## ALL ABOARD

Open for more than a year, The Great American Train Company ([www.greatamericantrain.com](http://www.greatamericantrain.com)) offers authentic trains made up of locomotives, riding cars and cabooses with a combined weight of 630 pounds. The battery-powered trains can pull 1,600 pounds along a track of varying lengths—the smallest track is a 60-foot by 76-foot oval.

