

Children will dig this easy-to-build sandbox

BY CHANDRA ORR
Copley News Service

Weekend do-it-yourselfers can create a custom sandbox that will satisfy a child's need for fun in just a few steps, with nothing more than standard tools and a trip to the local home-improvement store.

The best part? Long after the children have grown, this sandbox — designed by Dave Tesh, one of the general contractors on ABC's "Extreme Makeover Home Edition" and owner of Tesh Construction in Palmdale, Calif. — is still functional.

When building a sandbox, many rely on a simple wood frame box set atop the grass. It's entertaining for children, but can be an eyesore for adults. Instead, Tesh recommends creating a sandbox set into the ground for a more custom look.

Whether edged in traditional wood, more stylish concrete landscaping stones or even a plastic landscape barrier, a sandbox set into the ground will enhance the aesthetic of the yard by mimicking existing flower beds and mulched islands of trees.

"The easiest way is to build a wood border," Tesh said, "but there are other borders you can use that look more custom, like concrete or plastic. You can do curves and round corners. It can really look cool."

Unlike wood, concrete landscaping bricks or standard plastic landscape edging, both traditionally used to edge flower beds, allow for round, oval or even kidney-shaped sandboxes — a far cry from the stock 6-foot-square play areas.

However, the final decision on which materials to use may come down to future needs.

"One thing I would think about is if the children are young, what are you going to do with the sandbox when they get older?" Tesh said.

Once the children have grown and left the sandbox behind in pursuit of other fun and games, the play area can get a second life as a landscaping feature, but only with some careful forethought.

"If you go to the point of digging it out and using concrete borders — if you go the extra mile — you can take the sand out, leave borders and make a planter or fountain," Tesh said. If you make a free-flowing, small kidney-shaped sandbox, it could be turned into a planter, a fountain or even a small pond. Now you're in more of a grown-up area — and it wouldn't be too hard to dig it out even bigger and make a koi pond."

Regardless of the edging materials, the process for constructing a long-lasting sandbox is the same.

Leveling the ground — by

raking the existing soil or digging into the ground — is the first step.

"Conventionally, you would just want to use a level, find the lowest point and level the ground from there," Tesh said. "Or you can dig out the area and set the sandbox down into the ground."

"When you put the sand on top, the finished level would be even with the ground. It would look more custom that way.

"From there, the process is the same," Tesh said.

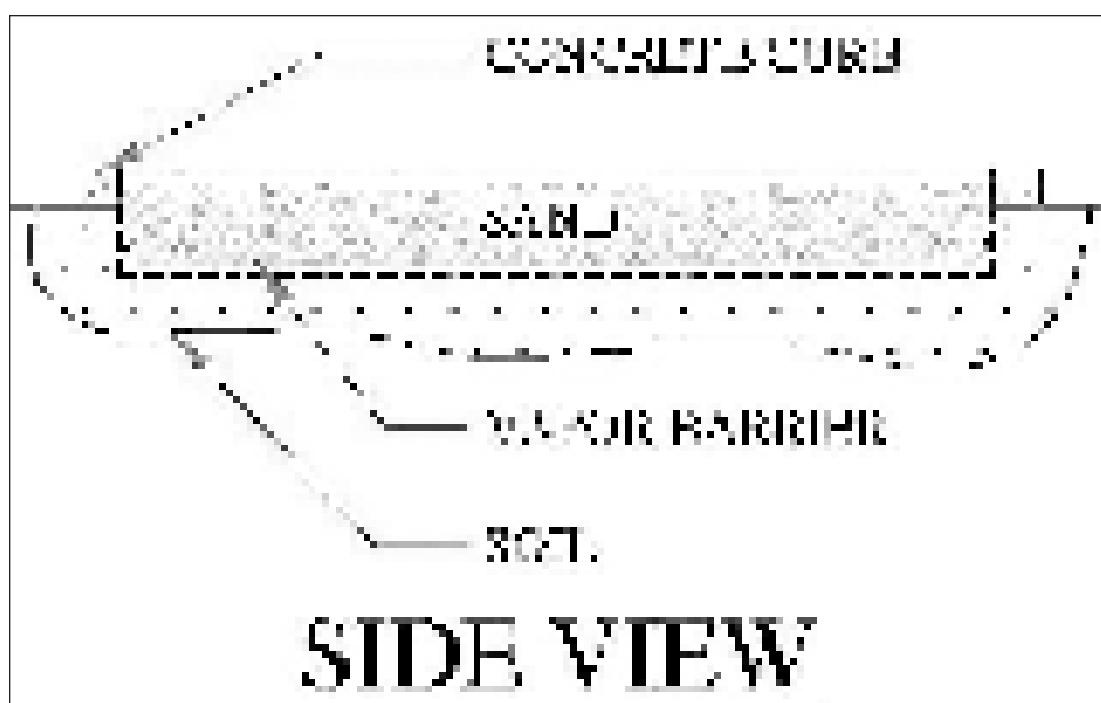
"You need to treat the soil with termite and insect repellent, the same type you would use if you were building a home. You just need to treat the soil so that you don't get any ants or termites coming up."

Once the ground is treated, the edging can be set into the ground — but don't add the sand just yet.

"To do it right, instead of just laying the sand in the soil, you want to add a plastic barrier between the sand and the existing soil," Tesh said. "Otherwise, when the kids dig in it, they tend to go past the level of the sand, and then you're mixing the soil with the sand and it's going to turn into a mud pie."

"Also, if you want to replace the sand when it gets dirty, it will be easier to bring that sand out."

Plastic ground cover designed for gardening and



landscaping or plastic sheets found in the paint department of any hardware store work equally well.

"Just lay the plastic across the bottom of the sandbox," Tesh said. "If you're using a wood border you don't have to line the sides, but with the dug-in process you should line the sides at least to the top — and maybe fold the plastic over for a cleaner look."

"On the bottom, you can poke a few holes in the plastic to allow water to drain into the soil."

The final step is to add the sand.

"You want to use play-

ground sand — make sure it's specified for playgrounds," said Tesh. "It's a cleaner sand. It's been washed ... it's more like what you would find at the beach."

The sand should be a minimum of 6-inches deep, but no more than 8-inches deep. "Kids like to dig. They get mesmerized by the way they can move the sand around and build a hole, so the deeper the better," said Tesh.

As a final touch, parents may wish to add a cover to the sandbox. Instead of merely sheltering the sandbox from inclement weather, add an umbrella, which

will also shelter children from the intense summer sun.

"The umbrella seems to work well," Tesh said. "Just put a plastic sleeve in the ground that holds the umbrella, the kind typically used over a garden table. It's neat because it's removable. You can give your kids some shade, and, if you don't want it, you can pull it out."

A simple 12-inch piece of PVC pipe buried in the ground makes the perfect sleeve — just be certain the opening is slightly larger than the umbrella pole and take care to keep the hole free of debris.

Homeowners warm to tankless water heaters

BY DAVID BRADLEY
The Associated Press

Americans love their hot water. And while tankless water heaters deliver vast supplies of on-demand hot water, many homeowners are warming to other benefits of these appliances: big energy and water savings.

According to a water heater expert, tankless versions can lop 30 to 50 percent off water heating costs compared to tank systems.

"A typical 40-gallon heater is like running your car all night in the garage until you drive it," said Peter LaRose of Nelson and Small, a Northeastern U.S. distributor of top-rated Rinnai tankless heaters. "Why have a water heater running when you don't need it? A tankless system uses no energy until you turn on the faucet."

Tank systems guzzle energy almost all day to maintain a preset temperature. As water cools, the system kicks on to reheat water. The cycle

repeats whether anyone is home or not.

And a tank water heater often can't keep up with high volume demand for showers, spa-like tubs and whirlpools. LaRose said only about 30 percent of a tank is drawn off before water must be heated again.

The compact natural gas unit is wall mounted inside or outside a home. Sensors detect when a faucet is turned on, forcing water over a thin copper plate heated by 32 small burners. The unit is vented outside.

The compactness of the heater — 18 inches wide by 27 inches high — makes it a space saver.

Homeowners use digital keypads to preset water temperatures to various rooms. Control pads are typically installed in laundry rooms, master baths or kitchens.

The keypads resolve safety issues, too. Tank systems heat water 130 F or higher, well above the 120 F comfort

zone for most showers. Once set, tankless water cannot be heated above the preset limit.

Expect to pay \$1,000 to \$1,200 for a Rinnai brand system, including installation. This compares to \$200 for the cost of a tank and \$300 to \$500 for professional installation. Tankless systems are not a do-it-yourself project. Homeowners can visit foreverhotwater.com for more information on dealer networks.

LaRose says tankless systems should last up to 20 years, nearly three to four times longer than tank systems.

"We think within 10 years, tankless systems will be the dominant source of hot water in North America," says LaRose. "As energy costs and water conservation become even bigger issues, homeowners will turn to tankless systems. It's the one responsible way to heat water for the home."

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