

# He Made Palm Trees For A Backyard Pool

"I thought other FARM SHOW readers might get a kick out of the palm trees I made for around my backyard swimming pool," says Doug Schiller, Belvidere, Ill.

Schiller says his wife said one day that it would be nice if there were palm trees around the 20 by 35-ft. pool. However, he lives in Illinois so real palm trees were out of the question.

"I looked online for artificial palm trees but found they're very expensive, so I decided to make my own using plastic drain tile, 55-gal. barrels, and real coconuts," says Schiller.

The homemade trees look realistic, with trunks that bend and taper toward the top. Real coconuts hang from them, and one tree even has a plastic monkey climbing up the trunk.

"I've made 3 palm trees, one 7 ft. tall and the others about 12 ft. tall. It took a lot of trial and error to build them, but it was worth the effort," says Schiller.

He used 55-gal. plastic oil barrels to make the leaves. He makes a pattern and then uses a jigsaw to cut around the barrel, creating strips 25 to 36 in. long and 8 to 10 in. wide depending on the size of the barrel. "I usually get 4 leaves from each barrel," says Schiller.

The curvature of the barrel is tighter than the curvature of the leaf, so he bends a 3/16-in. thick by 3/4-in. wide metal strap into the curvature he wants and then pop rivets it onto the bottom side of the leaf. "The metal straps give the leaves the right arch and also add strength," says Schiller.

To make bumps along the leaf's edges, he

puts one end of the metal strap into a vise and then uses a blow torch to heat the plastic so he can bend it. "Once the plastic cools it gets really hard. It's amazing how much stronger the bends make the leaves," says Schiller.

He uses 8 to 10-in. dia. drain tile for the tree trunks. To taper the trunk he cuts pie-shaped pieces out of the sides and then uses wire or zip strips to narrow up the diameter.

Lengths of aluminum or steel pipe run through the center of the drain tile to support the trunk. To bend the trunk, he lays the tree on a bench and puts a block of wood under each end. Then he runs ratchet straps around the center of the trunk and pulls the drain tile to one side until it bends. "One of the trees has a really big bend in it. On that tree I actually bent the pipe before I put it into the culvert," says Schiller.

Once the drain tile is bent he breaks up Styrofoam packaging material into small pieces, then shoves the pieces inside the drain tile until it's packed full. Then every foot or so, he drills holes into the drain tile's grooves and squirts Great Stuff aerosol spray foam through them. "The foam expands and packs the drain tile full, which forces the bend to stay in place," says Schiller.

The next step is to wrap lengths of rope around all the grooves, which smoothes out the trunk and also adds strength.

The tree trunks are anchored in cement about 3 ft. deep in the ground. Both the monkey and the real coconuts are roped to the tree.

All components are brushed with a



Doug Schiller wanted palm trees around his backyard swimming pool. So he made his own using plastic drain tile, 55-gal. barrels, and real coconuts.



Lengths of steel pipe run through center of drain tile to support tree trunk. To bend the trunk, he runs ratchet straps around trunk and pulls the tile to one side until it bends.

fiberglass resin and then covered with fiberglass mesh. More fiberglass resin is applied on top of the mesh, and finally everything is primed and painted.

He took photos as he went along and sells

plans. "There are a lot of shortcuts on what you can do," he says.

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# Grandma Mary's Weighted Quilts Comfort Kids With Autism

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

Mary Remarké knows that her weighted jean pocket quilts won't win blue ribbons at the fair. But each of the 200-plus quilts she has made has character – and a purpose. Her down-home version of weighted blankets helps calm children with autism. With the help of her husband, Mike, and a few friends and family members, Remarké gives all her quilts away.

Weighted blanket therapy has long been used by occupational therapists. The weight calms over-stimulated children and stabilizes moods.

When Remarké's grandson, Deen, was diagnosed with autism three years ago, a doctor suggested a weighted blanket might help. The problem was they cost \$200 to \$1,000, something his parents (unemployed at the time) couldn't afford.

Remarké began to experiment. She followed the formula that the blanket needs to be 10 percent of the person's weight, plus 1 lb., and decided to use jean pockets as squares. Deen loved his quilt – and there was a bonus.

"Deen loves the pockets to put stuff in," Remarké says. "He won't have a little car or dinosaur in every pocket."

After making another blanket for a friend, Remarké's daughter, Alli, suggested they make them for others. Often when children are diagnosed with autism it strains a marriage and the child ends up being raised by a single mother, who doesn't have a lot of money. After Alli created Deen's Blankets on Facebook, requests started pouring in. Some suggested she make them to sell, but Remarké is adamant that they stay free. So far, she has only accepted money for postage when the recipient could afford it.

Her reward is the friendships she's made and the stories she's heard.

"One said that her kid slept through the

whole night for the first time," Remarké says. Another mother told her she could tell when her son had a bad day at school. He would come home and roll himself up like a burrito in his blanket for comfort.

"One boy calls me Grandma Mary, because grandmas make blankets," she says with a laugh.

As a geriatric nurse, Remarké has also given quilts to people with Alzheimer's, neuropathy (nerve pain), and poor circulation. She made one for her sister after cancer treatment. The weight seems to relieve a variety of conditions.

To keep up – and organized – the couple turned their living room into a sewing room with a heavy-duty sewing machine as the main focus, along with shelves and containers for the materials used in the blankets. Pockets are cut in squares with about 2 in. of fabric around them for a seam allowance. Remarké cuts jean legs into strips and sews them together for the backing and uses 10 oz. batting. She adds a 6-in. denim border and uses a bright colored fabric called puzzle print for the binding.

"Mike has become very proficient at tying," Remarké says. He uses two strands of variegated primary colored crochet thread and triple knots it. Since the quilt is too bulky for a quilt frame, he sets it on a pvc frame and works from the center out.

The jean quilts have varied from 5 lbs. to almost 20 lbs. (with a mattress pad for the batting). Shipping averages \$15, and Remarké has sent quilts to many different states.

Though she won't charge for the quilts, Remarké accepts donations of jeans. Donors often leave boxes of them on the doorstep. For donors from other parts of the country, she suggests that they send just the pocket squares to save postage. She prefers men's



Mary Remarké's weighted jean pocket quilts help over-stimulated children stabilize their moods.

jean pockets because of their weight, but can use women and children's jean pockets.

Remarké also appreciates help from people who want to cut and sew the tops. Any financial contributions are used for supplies (such as batting) and shipping.

"They're not perfect. They're hodgepodge. They're kind of crooked. But each has its own

personality," Remarké says of the quilts. "We do it because we want to make their lives just a little bit easier."

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