FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

House & Home

Backyards for Kids
Ziba Kashef
Sunset Books
978-0-376-01060-5
(January 31, 2008)

Child development experts express concern that kids don't get enough outdoor exercise these days. *Backyards for Kids* is just the book for those who want to create a safe, fun, and perhaps challenging home environment, regardless of special limitations.

The measure of a "how-to" utility is how well it presents its message: Are the plans logical and easy to understand? Are they well-illustrated? Are they written matter-of-factly, or with a sense of humor and style? *Backyards* scores high on all these points; from design layout, to selecting materials, to execution, taking the reader through the steps honestly, and even suggesting when it might be a good time to call in a professional rather than do it yourself. The instructions are easy to follow, with schematics, line drawings and photos for a selection of tree houses, sand boxes, and swing sets. Knowing that kids love to be involved, *Backyards* also suggests age-appropriate tasks.

Kashef realizes that tastes change as kids grow up. That swing set that was so entertaining five years ago is now obsolete, so he offers suggestions for the different age groups. The little ones might enjoy sandboxes and tunnels.

"Tweens" desire more sophistication like tree houses and forts, as well as miniature houses/cottages to call their own. By the time they're in their teen years, many will have "graduated" to open spaces or even mini-skateboard parks.

There's also a section on how to select a play set, with a checklist of questions consumers should ask when considering what to purchase, whether raw materials, kits, or hiring someone to do the work for you. No detail is left out. "Before you build, take inventory to make sure you have all supplied materials plus the lumber you needed to purchase on your own," Kashef writes. How many hearts have been broken because a piece was damaged or missing, delaying construction? A section on sports and games includes ambitious projects such as bicycle obstacle courses with ramps, teeter-totters, and skate ramps. Of course, there are much

simpler ideas, such as basketball courts, soccer pitches, and even pint-sized baseball fields. Not every project requires master craftsman capabilities.

Those with less experience or ambition will appreciate a chapter on “swings ‘n’ things.” Whether your children are sporty or imaginative (or both), *Backyards For Kids* is an excellent source for projects, or just further ideas.

Ron Kaplan