

# Homeowners get the family spirit with backyard rinks

As legend tells it, Wayne Gretzky and Gordie Howe got their starts on the backyard rinks at their family homes. Perhaps a budding Jose Chouinard or Elizabeth Manley enjoyed the same advantage. Whatever the case, one enduring memory young skaters all hold is the rollicking fun of winter days spent on the family rink.

Not only does a good backyard rink give children a chance to develop their skating skills, it gives the whole family a place to laugh and unwind, but most importantly, a place to spend time together.

Even though backyard rinks have become a tradition, many homeowners still don't know how to go about building a rink that will last the season and provide a suitable skating surface.

Most will simply clear the snow from a patch of level ground in their backyard, get out the hose, and start flooding on the first cold day. Unfortunately, this method almost certainly leads to a rink which either refuse to ice over properly, or is so unstable and lopsided as to be unusable.

There is a way to build a successful backyard rink. It involves a little planning and modest outlay, but the results are well worth the trouble.

The first rule is to always use a plastic liner. This is crucial. You may balk at the expense, but lack of a liner is the single greatest factor in having a rink that doesn't set correctly. Even though the ground may be frozen, water will never

settle in the shape of a rink unless it has something to contain it. The liner must also be free of holes and seams.

You can purchase a sheet of 40ft. by 100ft. industrial plastic at most building supply stores. Check for availability beforehand, and use the dimensions of your backyard as well as the plastic as the yardstick for determining the size of your rink. Remember that you'll need to leave a fair amount of plastic for overhang.

Before you run out to buy a sheet of plastic though, there's some preparation to attend to.

Obviously, you'll have to pick out an area in your backyard which is relatively level. No yard is perfect, but the flatter the ground surface, the easier the rink will be to build and flood.

After you pick your spot and clear the snow away, you'll need to decide if you want to build boards for your rink or simply use snow for the sides. Boards are by far the best, but it is possible to forgo them.

If you choose boards, you'll want two-foot high section of plywood. They'll have to be attached to two-by-four inch posts, so some digging will be necessary to anchor the posts. As you can see, the process gets a bit labour-intensive, but the boards can be used for many winters to come.

If you decide to use snow for the sides of your rink, you'll need to be particularly careful that the snow is packed tightly and as verti-

cally as possible. Pile snow around the rink-to-be and tamp it solidly. Basically, you'll be making a two-foot high wall of packed snow.

The next stage is to apply the plastic sheet to your rink. First, check the plastic thoroughly for holes or tears. Again, it's extremely important that the sheet be large enough to overhang the sides of the rink. Then, place the sheet over your rink and either staple it to the

boards or weigh it down securely over the piled snow sides of the rink.

Now comes the critical step - flooding. Two factors will make or break this endeavour: temperature and attentiveness.

You should keep your eye on the weather forecast and pick a two- or three-day period when the temperature is expected to rise no higher than -6 or -7 C. Estimates range from about 12 to

24 hours for the rink to fill.

Once you've flooded, attentiveness is a must. Check constantly to make sure the plastic liner hasn't been pulled down by the water's weight. It could take up to four days for the ice to become completely solid, so resist the temptation to skate or walk on it prematurely.



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**FRONT**



**BACK**

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