

## Outdoor Games and Outdoor Living

**Sooner or later, all pond keepers will look away from their water features and around the yard.**

Posted: April 14, 2008

Tom Tilley, owner of Tilley's Nursery Inc., is looking into offering customized putting greens for people's yards. Sooner or later, all pond keepers will look away from their water features and around the yard. On a beautiful day, why go back inside? Instead, how about a game of chess in the sunshine with 4-foot teakwood chess pieces on a marble-tiled chess board installed next to the brightly flashing koi and spectacular pondless fountain?

Tom Tilley, owner of Tilley's Nursery Inc., in Coopersburg, Pa., said outdoor games are not new. He said he installed a bocce ball court for a customer 20 years ago. "Bocce was a big social event for him," he said. "He would get his friends together once a week to play bocce and drink wine. He grew up in Italy watching his grandfather and father play bocce, so it was a family affair."

Today, as more clients take outdoor living to the next level, games have become an integral part of that evolution. Sometimes, clients just want an open green space for kids to play games like baseball, badminton or croquet, Tilley said. He also has installed horseshoe pits and a sand volleyball court, and currently has a quote out for a backyard shuffleboard court.

"Right now, I'm looking into offering installed putting greens for people's yards," he said. "In the same way we can customize water features and ponds, we could customize putting greens to work in a given area according to size and budget. The backyard putting green concept goes well with the water garden concept. I think there is a market for this kind of thing."

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Chris Becker, owner of Lynx Leisure, an online retailer selling outdoor games in Calgary, Alberta, said the fastest selling outdoor games right now are giant chess and checkers. "You can get pieces ranging from 2 feet to 4 feet, in materials from acrylic resin to very high-end teak," he said. The boards range from economical vinyl to marble tiles installed in the yard.

Other big sellers for Becker include a giant tower game similar to Jenga and other over-sized versions of old favorites such as Connect-Four, dominoes, PickUp Sticks, and Twister. "I'm even getting schools buying multiple mats to involve hundreds of students in Twister," Becker said. "It's a great game for parties."

Croquet, bocce and ladder golf also sell well right now, Becker said, and for more active families, ziplines and slacklining (a tightrope-like net stretched between trees). "Slacklining is for the young-at-heart," Becker said. "You try to walk across it. Some of the kids are doing tricks on it, almost like they would do on a skateboard."

Games make for a fun party, encourage active family time and inspire a greater appreciation of a beautifully landscaped outdoor space. "Some of these games are inexpensive and people buy them just for parties," Becker said. "Some of them, like the giant chess sets, can run \$600 just for the plastic pieces and vinyl mat, and the price goes up from there. People aren't buying these for parties, they are buying them for their families."

What better way to get the kids outside when the adults are working on and enjoying the water garden? "People want their outdoor living space to flow right into an outdoor athletic area," Tilley said. "A lot of our clients are active during the day. Then they want to sit down, cook out and relax in the evening by their water feature. It makes the outdoor space more versatile and more enjoyable."