

Swim spa to the rescue

BY ALISON OSINSKI

Q My backyard is too small for a full-size swimming pool, but I really enjoy water walking and lap swimming. Is there anything I can install that would fit in the yard and still allow me to get a good water workout?

A You might want to consider installing a swim spa. Swim spas are elongated spas that have an additional recirculating pump, intake and powerful jet installed in one wall. The jet creates a current against which bathers can swim or run.

Like a treadmill, the swim jet allows the bather to swim or run in place, rather than travel up and down the pool. The current can be turned on and off, and adjusted to the swimming or running strength of the user. Unlike tethers or other restraining equipment designed to allow swimmers to work out in place, swim jets do not impede strokes. Development of smooth front, back and side strokes is possible, but swimming against a current does take some practice.

Swim spas can be purchased as prefabricated, self-contained units, or a swim jet can be added to a traditional swimming pool either during its construction or as an aftermarket item installed over the deck edge.

Q Our county just passed a new pool and spa barrier regulation that requires homeowners to install multiple layers of protection, including fences, alarms and pool safety covers or other protective devices. It also requires that gates in pool fences be inspected. Can you tell us how to tell if a gate is installed and operating properly?

A Regular inspection of pool barriers and proper preventive maintenance are essential to effectively deterring access by unattended children or trespassers.

Any barrier system can be rendered useless if you prop a gate open, fail to maintain closures and latch mechanisms, ignore or disable alarms or forget to lock the gate.

Access gates in the pool-barrier fence should open outward from the pool, and should be at least as tall as the mandatory height of the fence.

The closer mechanism should be inspected monthly and adjusted to allow the gate to self-close and positively self-latch from any open position.

The latching mechanism should be mounted on the inside of the gate, located at least 4 feet off the ground and at least 6 inches below the top of the gate. Gates should be equipped with locking devices and should remain locked when the pool is not in use or supervised.

To prevent anyone without a key from getting in by accessing the latch from the exterior of the gate, a rigid webbing, shield or plate should be installed extending to either side of the latch and from below the latch to the top of the gate. The shield should not have openings greater than 1/4 inch in diameter.

Remember that multiple layers of protection are designed only to delay access to a pool during lapses in supervision. Barriers should never be thought of as a substitute for active supervision by a responsible adult. ■

Dr. Alison Osinski owns Aquatic Consulting Services in San Diego. For more information, call her at the Swimming Pool Hot Line, (900) 446-6075 ext. 820, between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Pacific time. (Callers are billed \$2.95 per minute. You must be 18 or older to call.)

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