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How to Make an Ugly Metal or Plastic Tub Look Nice for Captive Animals

By Zuzana Kukol, Summer 2009



1. Most private exotic and domestic animal owners don't have the thousands or millions of dollars needed to construct a beautiful, fancy pool and waterfalls seen at major zoos.

The round or long standard metal livestock water tanks with the drain are some of the most used water containers, and are available in many different sizes.

Sometimes, an old bathtub can be used for the same purpose.

The upside is that they are relatively cheap, easy to find, clean, and are durable. The downside is that they are ugly and get too hot in the summer. The animals are less likely to try to climb into them in order to avoid touching the hot metal surface.



2. Living in the hot Nevada desert and not wanting to waste water, we decided to make the tubs more aesthetically pleasing, as well as practical. To insulate them to keep the water cooler in summer, we bury them in the ground.

If you don't have sloping ground, you can build a mound.



3. We worked with one old plastic bathtub and few metal tanks, round and long ones.



4. The hole is dug in the shape of the tub. The ditch for the drain pipe continued to the outside of the cage, so the animals can't get to it and chew on the drain valve.





5. The soil in the high desert is very dry and rocky, so we used a sifter to get rid of the big rocks from the soil excavated from the hole. The fine sifted soil (can be substituted with sand) is then used to fill in the space around the tub in the hole. When setting the tub in the ground, use the sifted soil to level the tub. If the tub drain is on the side, angle the tub slightly toward the drain. Since tub drains tend to be predrilled about 1 inch from the bottom, this helps to more completely drain the water from the tub.



6. We used the plastic PVC pipe available in home building stores. The wider the pipe, the faster the pool will drain and the less likely it will get clogged with the animal hair and other debris. Depending on what size the existing tub drain hole is, you can get different attachments, fittings and valves to drain the tub.

7. PVC pipe cement/glue was used to seal the pipe and attachments



8. In construction, white pipe is used for the incoming clean water, and the black pipe is used for the outgoing dirty water. Since we only use bleach to clean, we used mostly white pipe.



9. The metal tubs come with the drain holes and plugs about 1 inch off the ground, which still leaves 1 inch of dirty water in the tub when draining.



To drain the last 1 inch of water out of the tub, we use simple, (non electric) water powered water pump.



10. Alternative drain idea:



If you are handy, you can just keep the manufactured drain closed, and drill a new hole at the bottom of the tub and install a regular shower drain, which will drain the metal or plastic animal tub completely.





11. Once the pipe is tested for leakage, it is then buried under the soil. The only thing left exposed is the valve to drain the tub.



12. Time to fill up the in ground tubs with water.



13. The tubs passed the technical test and are now tiger approved. However, leaving soil around the tub will increase the rate at which the tub water would get muddy, thus increasing the frequency at which the water needs to be changed. Being sensitive to Nevada water issues, we decided to fix the problem by pouring concrete around it and setting in the combination of commercial stepping stones and local boulders.



14. We bought few bags of pre-mixed concrete mix.



15. The other tools used were a plastic mixing tub, liquid cement color to make the concrete match the color of the stepping stones, and various trowels and spatulas to spread the concrete mix.



16. This metal round tub was on a slight hill and we decided to increase the slope even more.



17. We arranged large native boulders in a half circle around the elevated portion of the in ground metal tub and filled it with smaller rocks and dirt.



18. Then we put wire rabbit fencing over it to keep it all together.



19. Next we sprayed our rock structure with water to prepare it for the pouring of concrete.



20. The Concrete mixed with cement color was poured inside the boulder 'structure' and directly on the ground around the rest of the tub. The stepping stones were set in the colored concrete around the tub, creating a ledge.



21. Once the concrete hardens, the tubs are filled with fresh clean water.





22. Grasses and bamboo were planted around the tubs.



23. Once again, the tubs are approved by the tigers. However, they can be used by different cat species, canines, non human primates, reptiles, birds and many water loving domestic animals.

Just add the toys (heavy duty plastic zoo balls in our case) and let the fun begin.



24. Double the fun with two tubs in one habitat.



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