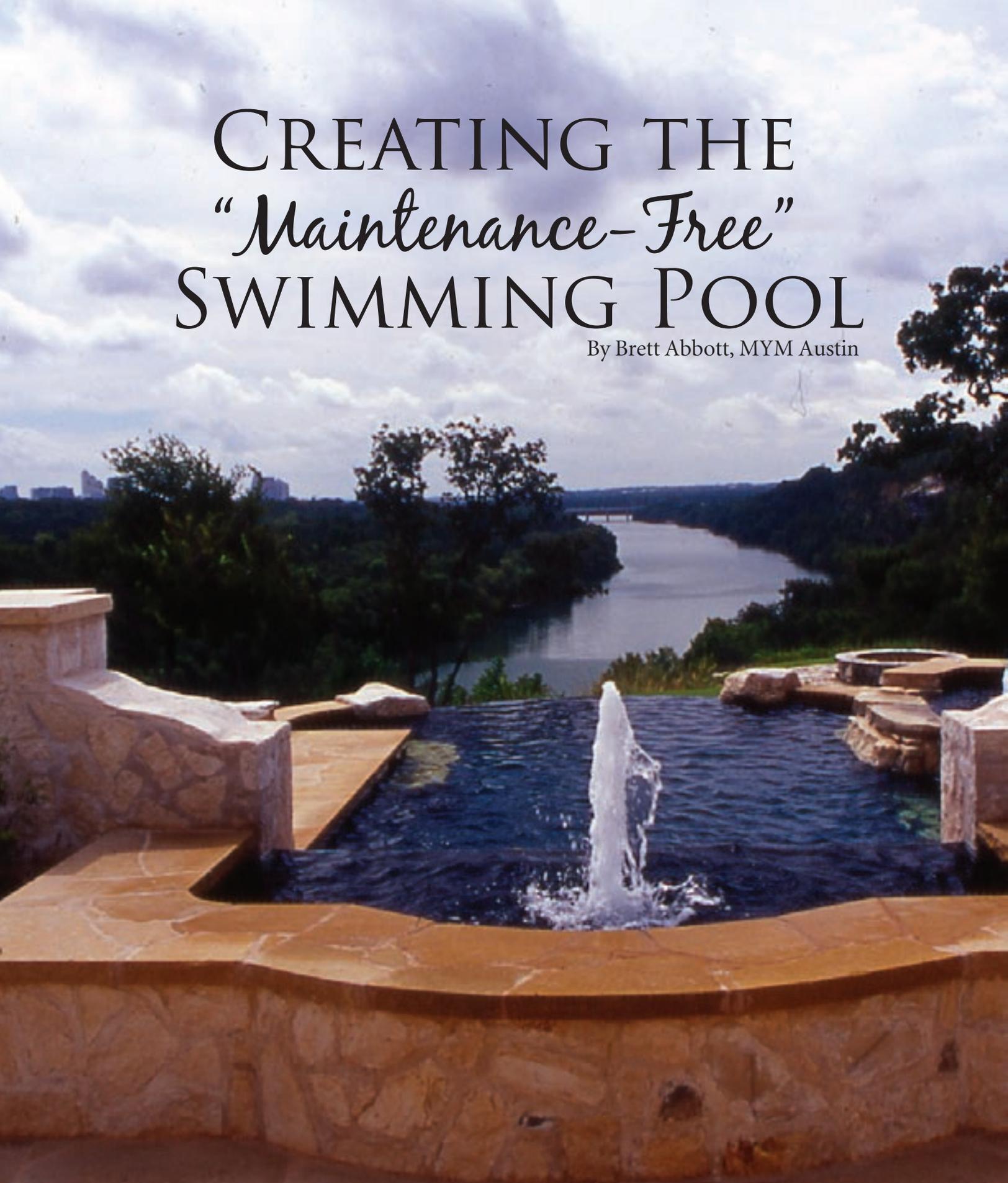
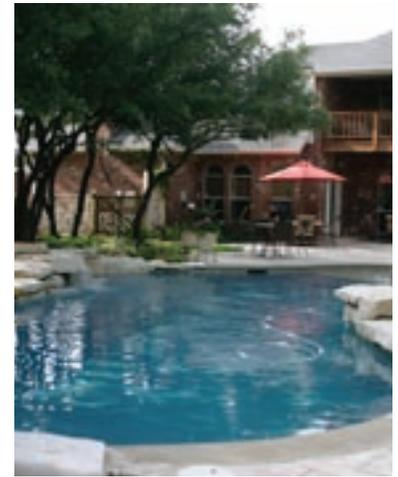


CREATING THE *"Maintenance-Free"* SWIMMING POOL

By Brett Abbott, MYM Austin





In years past, the downside of owning a swimming pool was the weekly ritual of skimming leaves, clumsy vacuuming, and dumping smelly powdered chlorine into the water. But recent developments and new technologies have made these old headaches a thing of the past. Today's swimming pool is fast approaching the point of requiring virtually no maintenance at all. The secret lies in controlling the three biggest challenges to pool cleanliness: dirt, debris and chemicals.

The first step in keeping the pool clean is vacuuming up any dirt that collects on the bottom. There are several excellent "automatic cleaners" on the market, but they all have one drawback—you have to haul the contraption and its assorted hoses out of the pool and store them somewhere whenever you want to use the pool. Not too terribly difficult, but still a nuisance and a bit of an eyesore. A better solution is the new "in-floor cleaning" system. Somewhat reminiscent of a pop-up sprinkler head, a collection of nearly invisible, flush-mounted cleaning heads are strategically located throughout the bottom of the pool. Permanently built in to the pool, but never in the way of any swimmer, these systems make old-fashioned "vacuuming" obsolete. One catch: you can't retrofit an existing pool with this system; it must be installed when the pool is built.



The next step is to minimize the dirt that gets into the pool in the first place. This is where automatic pool covers come in. Any pool or spa can be fitted with a durable cover that not only blocks out dirt and debris, but also provides excellent safety protection against anyone falling in the pool. In fact, some of these covers are so strong you can actually walk across them, as though the pool wasn't even there. These are usually installed in a hidden "cubby" that keeps the cover hidden and out of the way, except when in use. Most of these covers can be customized for any size or shape of pool.

The third challenge for pool owners has been chemical maintenance, including the handling of chemicals, and managing the levels of four or five different chemicals all at the same time. This is an area where many different options have become available. Let's review the more popular of these options:

The well-known benefit of a chlorine generator is that you can virtually eliminate the need for weekly handling of chlorine. Instead, you simply pour a pre-determined amount of common rock salt into your pool, and a small, silent, in-line generator converts the salt to chlorine.

Ozonators and UV Radiation are becoming increasingly popular methods of sanitation. Ozone (O₃) and/or ultraviolet light will kill bacteria, and greatly reduce the need for chlorine in the water. Yet another approach is the addition of special minerals and buffering agents such as "Pool Frog"™ to help stabilize the water. Any or all of these approaches, when combined with a chlorine generator, can allow you to leave your pool for weeks at a time without worrying about the chemicals.

The latest and perhaps most promising water-management technology involves "super-filtering" the water to the level of pure drinking water. This system, currently offered by EcoSmarte™, actually eliminates the need for chlorine and salt altogether, using traditional drinking-water technology instead (oxidation and ionization) to purify the water. In fact, it's so clean and pure that many homeowners are using it for their koi ponds as well.

Modern automation has further reduced the homeowner's involvement in taking care of the pool. Some of the latest systems will actually monitor the chemicals and adjust the levels for you. The remote controls on these systems (waterproof, of course), allow you to open or close the covers, turn on lights or waterfalls, or just about anything else you want to control or automate. Most homeowners leave one remote out by the pool and install a second remote inside the house for easy access.

Of course, the fastest and simplest way to create a maintenance-free swimming pool is to hire a pool maintenance company to handle it for you. In addition to handling the weekly maintenance, they'll also keep a sharp eye out for potential problems before they occur. The better service companies will remind you when it's time for your semi-annual filter clean and system check.

For more information on these latest technologies and the trend toward "maintenance-free" pools, contact your local reputable pool builder at **800-NEW-POOL** or at www.LewAkins.com.