






\_PHOTOS: KIM HUGHES/THE GRID  
Alex Duff: the Cadillac of swimming pools.  
TUE JUN 25, 2013





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PLACES

# The Grid Guide to Swimming Pools

Hot enough for ya? The City of Toronto’s 58 outdoor pools open full-time this week—however, not all of them were created equally.

BY: KIM HUGHES

Did you know that the City of Toronto operates 58 outdoor swimming pools (and 64 indoor pools, 106 wading pools, and 93 splash pads) in pretty much every nook and cranny in town? Few ponder the options available beyond their own neighbourhood—and Sunnyside-Gus Ryder, overlooking the lake, grabs all the attention—but a subway token is all that stands between you and “afternoon, evening, and weekend aquatic programming [that] includes leisure, family and length swimming opportunities” (as promised at the tony Lambton-Kingsway Pool in the city’s west end).

With City pools kicking off full-time operations this Friday (June 28), we survey and rate a small, random sample of what’s out there. (Note: Outdoor pools are already open on a part-time basis—check locations for hours—and some offer extended hours during heatwaves, like the one we’re in right now.)





**Name:** Alex Duff Memorial Pool

**'Hood:** Bloor and Christie, located at the north-west corner of Christie Pits Park. #CHP

**Vibe:** Pure bliss in a beautiful park smack-dab in the centre of the city—though, like most pools we checked out, it offers precious little shade poolside. Lots of nearby trees, though.

**Bells & Whistles:** With its 25m lap pool (and access ramp), shallow splash pool for kids, “warm conversation pool,” deep diving pool with 1m board and a two-storey water slide (!), Alex Duff may be the granddaddy of inner-city pools. The Baskin Robbins and street-meat cart operating at the south-east edge means instant picnic and, Christie Pits has oodles of tables scattered throughout the park.

**Weirdness Factor:** Overzealous lifeguards. A journalist friend who lives in the area and is prone to sun-burning still blanches at the incident two years ago when she turned up wearing protective covering only to be brusquely escorted off-premises because, she was informed, “street clothes” were not permitted (though she claims “it was just a T-shirt”).

**Rating (out of 5):** 5/5—top grade. Even the graffiti decorating the pool area’s foundation is wicked-cool.







**Name:** Alexandra Park Outdoor Pool

**'Hood:** Bathurst and Dundas at the Scadding Court Community Centre. #DNW

**Bells & Whistles:** None—the pool is serviceable and unspectacular. But some of the nearby amenities are surprisingly cool, like the row of lip-smacking independent food vendors on the south side of Dundas (Mac' N gourmet macaroni and cheese, Kitchen Cargo chicken pies, I Deal Coffee, etc). The Toronto Public Library's Sanderson branch is right there if you want to grab a book and—god forbid—if anything unfortunate happens, Toronto Western Hospital is across the street.

**Weirdness Factor:** With the CN Tower rising fiercely to the south and the crazy lady hollering at the pigeons, Alexandra Park never for a minute lets you forget you are in the concrete jungle—which, it turns out, is a somewhat discombobulating place to strip down and swim.

**Rating (out of 5):** 2/5—a nice idea but the dominant sturm und drang of the city diminishes desired transcendence.





**Name:** Monarch Park Outdoor Pool

**'Hood:** A few blocks south of Danforth, halfway between Greenwood and Coxwell on Felstead Avenue. #LTI

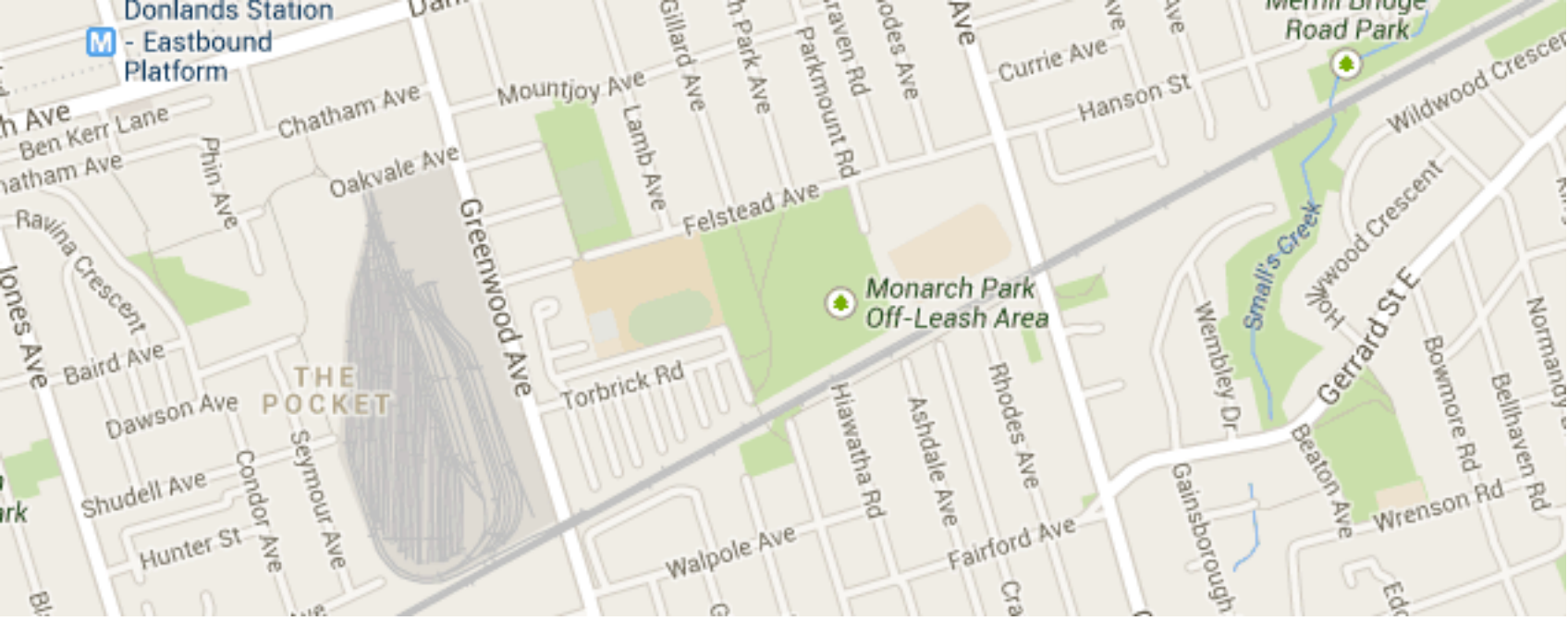
**Vibe:** “I’m in the city—really?” Set in a smallish but pristine park bisected by a pedestrian boulevard lined by rows of old-growth trees, Monarch Park invokes the country despite being a stone’s throw from boisterous Little India and the ever-grinding TTC Greenwood Yard.

**Bells & Whistles:** The City website sums it up best: “The swimming pool area features a 25m pool with diving area, 2 storey waterslide, raised seating area, and a separate wading pool area. Monarch Park Pool also offers a variety of swimming lessons for all ages, including leadership classes and parent and tot classes”—which explains the pool’s dedicated “stroller area.” (How cute is that?)

**Weirdness Factor:** Nothing apparent; amenities such as restaurants and convenience stores are keenly lacking, so it’s BYO water and snacks.

**Grade (out of 5):** 4/5—it’s a bit tricky to find, and a hot-dog cart would be awesome, but Monarch Park is pretty and very peaceful.





**Name:** Mitchell Field Outdoor Pool

**'Hood:** North York, a short hike north and east of the North York Centre subway station at the Mitchell Field Community Centre. #NYK

**Vibe:** The pool sits on a residential street facing a row of large, detached McMansions; discreet, yes, but the multiple condo towers garlanding nearby Yonge Street—to say nothing of the gargantuan 24-hour Metro grocery store at the corner of Yonge and Church Avenue—reinforce a distinctly urban feel. (In other words, it's no Eringate Park. Now *that's* a suburban pool.)

**Bells & Whistles:** As with Alexandra Park, none to speak of. The utilitarian pool is suitable for splashing and laps, but doesn't offer a water slide, kiddie pool area, or much else.

**Weirdness Factor:** Sorry, but looking at cookie-cutter houses, no matter how stately, just doesn't soothe the soul. Awesome-convenient for those living in them, though.

**Grade (out of 5):** 2/5—in a word, meh.





**Name:** Riverdale Park East Outdoor Pool

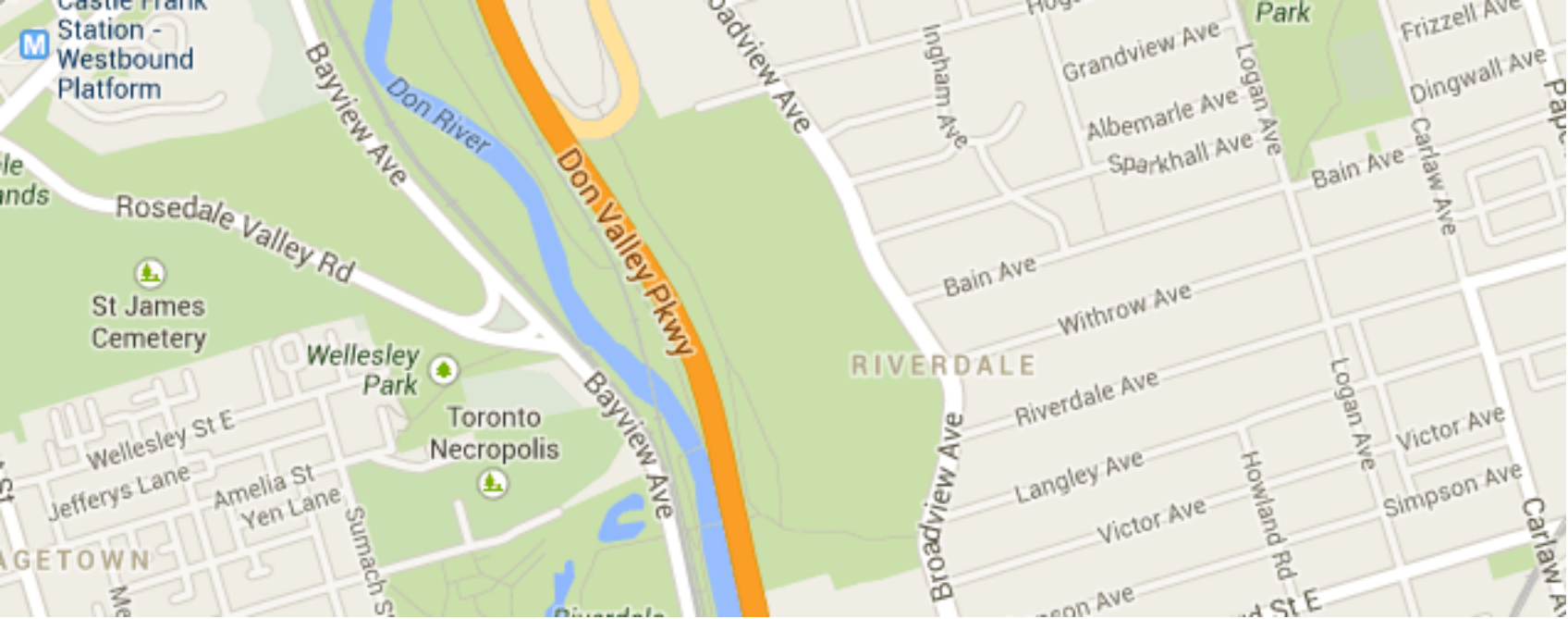
**'Hood:** Broadview south of Danforth in that bowl-like park best known for the killer winter tobogganing hill and spectacular west-facing views of the downtown skyline. #RIV

**Vibe:** Purposefully or not, the nearby tennis courts underscore the area's budding affluence, witnessed to the north at Playter Estates and to the east in so-called prime Riverdale. But hey, parks are for people, and so are their pools.

**Bells & Whistles:** According to an on-site lifeguard—a different one than the staffer who screeched bloody murder at me for peeking inside a gate prior to general opening time—the water slide isn't working at the moment, but the pool's expansive size and setting amid large trees overlooking the DVP is nevertheless really, really nice.

**Weirdness Factor:** Hyper-vigilant lifeguards, though that's presumably a plus for those visiting with children.

**Grade (out of 5):** 3/5. Not quite Alex Duff or Monarch Park, but an excellent place to wow out-of-towners seeking unique city sights.



What’s your favourite outdoor pool in the city? Let us know in the comments section below.

post a comment

Latest

**anne**

no hours listed for any of the pools on the P & R website or through hyperlink in story

3

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11:18 pm on July 3, 2013

Reply

Report

**Wally W.**

Don't let Rob Ford know, he'll call them "gravy" and shut them all down.

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3

2:49 pm on July 3, 2013

Reply

Report

**zugloXIV**

I recently returned from Hungary where outdoor public pools are taken quite seriously with thermal water ranging from 26C to 38C. Multiple pools are all within the facility with dozens of water jets from the walls, pool bottoms and overhead, and multiple serious waterslides are offered. Kiosks serving fast food and draft beer and whatever else you want are there. Unfortunately, we don't come within a

country mile of that.

 4  0

12:54 pm on July 3, 2013

 Reply  Report



Mela

Agreed! I love Toronto but it lacks in so many ways with regards to planning. Ever the concrete lover & lack of decent refreshments to due city laws. Other countires surpass whats on offer here.

Enjoyed the report though, mostly for the photos.

 0  0

11:18 am on July 30, 2013

 Report

ijo

You could have mentioned the below freezing water at Alexandra park as a ....weakness? lol

Besides, DD Summerville is the best pool for lap swimming. Legit 50 metres, not yards. It has an additional pool for kids and a pool with 5m and 10m diving decks.

However, sunnyside might be the best pool in the city. It is 100 metres long. It has people of all different ages. It also has a section for lap swimming, about 3-4 lanes organized by speed of the swimmers. The length of the lap swimming section is 25 yards- very reasonable for swimmers.

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11:22 am on July 3, 2013

 Reply  Report

Hobbs and Goblin

Thank you for taking photographs.

You've done these list articles in the past without taking photos and only showing the map.

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11:45 am on June 27, 2013

 Reply  Report

Kieran

City made a mess of Summerville Olympic Pool only realising that it needed concrete restoration before trying to open it this month..now its not expected to open until mid July..couldnt even keep it open for 3 months of the year.

 2  1

4:54 pm on June 26, 2013

 Reply  Report

Anonymous

Gus Ryder

 0  1

6:14 pm on June 25, 2013

 Reply  Report

jitte



The city’s website says we have 58 outdoor pools. How come there are only 5 on this list, and on what basis were these the five that were selected?

http://www.toronto.ca/parks/prd/facilities/outdoor-pools/index.htm

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5:42 pm on June 25, 2013  Reply  Report

question

To the best of my knowledge these are mostly lounging pools. Are there any outdoor pools in Toronto where lap swimming is permitted (and encouraged)?

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1:16 pm on June 25, 2013  Reply  Report



Noel

The best pool for lap swimming is Summerville pool near woodbine. I don’t know why they did not put it on the list as it is one of the city’s flagship pools with a gigantic 50 meter lap pool a separate wading pool and a diving tank with two story diving tower. It is also elevated and offers great views of the surrounding beach as it is situated right on the boardwalk. Seriously Kim Hughes should be ashamed of this drivel she typed up as she also doesn’t mention Sunnyside or the highpark pool; both of which are as busy if not more so then most of the pools listed here.

 1  2

2:19 am on June 26, 2013  Report



point

I have not been to summerville but gus ryder and high park pools are not good for lap swimming. gus ryder in particular has potential but the lanes are laid across the width of the pool and it’s used by the largely european population who bake at the side and plop in to cool off. High park pool is a mess.

to restate the original question – is there an outdoor pool in Toronto recommended by lap swimmers.

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11:39 pm on June 26, 2013  Report



anothergirlanotherplanet

You can swim lanes from 7-8 every day of the week and in the morning on some at High Park Pool.

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11:18 pm on June 30, 2013  Report



nearby

To those criticizing the omission of Summerville, perhaps it’s because Summerville is currently CLOSED. Don’t fall off your high horse.

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8:03 am on July 4, 2013  Report



Patrick

Great list. Please follow up with an article “Guide for respectfully pool crashing in the middle of the night (on a Monday)”. Tip #1 please don’t dive off the noisy diving board so incessantly that no one in the entire neighbourhood can sleep. 😊

👍 8 🗑️ 1

10:31 am on June 25, 2013

 Reply  Report



Anonymous

For some reason, city’s website is wrong. Monarch Park is 50 yard pool. Considerably bigger than 25m

👍 0 🗑️ 0

12:52 pm on June 25, 2013

 Report