

Outdoor Living





© ADOBE STOCK

Outdoor Living Space

You've heard of bringing the outdoors in, but you can also bring the indoors out by setting up an outdoor living space.

Whether it's for entertaining large crowds, or just getting together with family, an outdoor living space can be a great addition to your backyard.

EVALUATE YOUR SPACE

Look at how big of a space you have to work with and determine how

much you'll need to modify the space. If you need to take out shrubs or flower beds, that's probably a job you can do yourself.

If you're removing trees or structures, however, it would be a good idea to check with your local authorities, or, better yet, call a professional who can take care of the whole thing for you.

PICK YOUR FOCAL POINT

Decide on a focal point for your outdoor space. Will it be the cooking area? Set your sights on a grilling space and outdoor kitchen. Entertaining? Plan for lots of seating space and maybe a

bar or a fire pit. Family time? Think of a cozy conversation set with a coffee table and plenty of room for games. Avoid having more than one focal point; just like inside your home, you don't want to clutter the space.

CHOOSE YOUR FIXTURES

Your fixtures will form the foundation of your outdoor living space, so choose wisely. You want fixtures that will hold up well to the outdoor elements in your area, be it flooding rain or harsh winter weather. The best way to do this is to visit a local home or patio store to choose products and fixtures that will best fit your way of life

and your budget.

UTILITIES

Your new outdoor space, especially if it includes a kitchen, may need utilities run to it. This is not the time to DIY it, especially with dangerous explosives like natural gas. Call professionals to run your lines and install equipment like grills and fire pits. A professional can properly run the lines so that it stays out of the way of other construction on the property and is safe. Furthermore, they can properly set up permits and do the paperwork that allows you to pay for the gas, water and power you use.

Summer Dishes: Pasta Salads

Cool and refreshing, pasta salads are a great dish to showcase the best vegetables summer has to offer.

The basic building blocks of a great pasta salad are a good quality pasta, a dressing and loads of crunchy fresh veggies. Once you've got that down, you can unleash spices, herbs and let your imagination — and your taste buds — run wild.

PICK A PASTA

Spaghetti and linguine are amazing, just not in a salad. You want small pieces with lots of nooks and crannies to soak up your dressing. Think rotini, farfalle and similar shapes. You also want to cook it just past al dente so that it holds up to chilling and serving.

MAKE YOUR DRESSING

You can use a bottled dressing or you can make your own. If you decide to DIY, start with something as simple as oil, vinegar and a handful of herbs. You can add lemons or limes, or, you can use a creamy mayo-based sweeter dressing or tangy cream cheese. Let your taste buds be your guide.

SNAP INTO SOME VEGGIES

Next, add chopped veggies into the mix. Fresh corn ker-



© ADOBE STOCK

nels are a great addition, as are cubes of creamy avocado and slices of fresh, crunchy celery. Don't forget flavorful summer tomatoes, chopped spinach, bell pepper, broccoli, carrots and more. Just make sure you chop them well.

BOW TIE AND SPINACH SALAD

2 cups uncooked multigrain bow tie pasta
 1 15-ounce can garbanzo beans, rinsed and drained
 6 cups fresh baby spinach
 2 cups fresh broccoli florets
 2 plum tomatoes, chopped

1 medium sweet pepper, chopped
 1/2 cup cubed part-skim mozzarella cheese
 1/2 cup pitted Greek olives, halved
 1/4 cup minced fresh basil
 1/3 cup sundried tomato salad dressing
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1/4 cup chopped walnuts, toasted

1. Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and transfer to a large bowl.
2. Add beans, veggies, cheese, olives, basil and pasta. Drizzle with dressing while pasta is still warm, sprinkle with salt and toss to coat. Sprinkle with walnuts.
3. Chill and serve.

Freshen Up Patio Furniture

You start out with gorgeous outdoor furniture, but after a few seasons, you start to see some rust and dirt. Here are some hints for giving your old patio furniture a whole new look.

START WITH A CLEAN SURFACE

Whether you're working with metal, plastic or wood furniture, you need to start with a clean surface. Clean all the dirt from the piece, then remove rust and other imperfections. Lightly sand wooden surfaces. Remove all flaking and loose paint. Wash the furniture after each step to keep it clean. Take hardware off the furniture and label it so you can put it back when you're done.

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TOOLS

If you're using a brush-on paint, make sure you choose the appropriate tools for the job. Pick smaller brushes and rollers to fit into the tight spaces on your patio furniture. A larger paint roller would work well on surfaces like a table top. Feeling creative? Used painter's tape or masking tape to create designs on the furniture.

CHOOSE YOUR PAINT

If you're using a brush-on paint, choose a good primer



© ADOBE STOCK

and make sure you apply it smoothly. If you pick a spray paint, you can skip the priming step. Make sure you choose a paint formulated for use on outdoor furniture.

Working with a spray paint,

remember to keep the paint the required distance from the surface and work in quick bursts. Be careful of dripping. Plastic furniture also requires a special paint to make sure it will bond, no matter if it's

spray paint or roll-on paint.

Work in thinner coats, which go on smoothly and dry quickly. A good rule of thumb is to use two coats or whatever is suggested on the manufacturer's label.

WHERE TO WORK

You can paint any time of year, within the temperature guidelines on the label. Choose a well-ventilated area with plenty of shade and stay hydrated while you work.

Fresh Summer Sips

There's nothing more summery than a sweet frozen cocktail, and daiquiris fit the bill perfectly.

Daiquiris are cocktails whose main ingredients are rum, juice and sugar. Originally, these drinks were served over crushed ice, but now they're more commonly served as frozen drinks more the consistency of a smoothie.

HARDWARE

You're going to need a good blender, one that can easily and smoothly crush ice. You're also going to need glasses. Hurricane glasses work, as do margarita glasses, Mason jars and plain old red Solo cups.

SOFTWARE

Now here's the fun part. You need a quality white rum, and your local liquor store can help you with that. Next, you need fruit, and your local grocery store could help with that. Just about any fruit would work, but strawberry is a classic choice. Raspberry is great, as are peaches, banana, pineapple, blueberry, mangoes and more. Citrus is also a great choice — think grapefruit, orange and lime. Pick fruit that's fresh and in season for the best and freshest taste.

STRAWBERRY DAIQUIRI

12 ounces fresh hulled strawberries
6 ounces light rum

4 ounces fresh-squeezed lime juice
5 tablespoons sugar

In a blender, combine all ingredients. Blend until smooth and divide among glasses.

BANANA DAIQUIRI

2 large bananas, sliced
1 cup coconut milk
1 lime, juiced
1/2 cup sugar

6 cups ice
4 ounces white rum

Put all ingredients into a blender and blend until smooth. Makes about two glasses.



© ADOBE STOCK

Flowers that can Take the Heat

Summer is a great time to show off bright blooms, but scorching heat can torch flowers. Here are some blossoms that can take the heat.

Lantana. A favorite of butterflies and a hardy grower, lantana features clusters of bright pink, yellow and purple flowers, depending on the variety you get. It cascades over borders and trails over walls, tolerating deer and drought all the way. In some southern zones, it can even come back year after year.

Salvia. Bright purple, pink or red spikes up to 2 feet tall are beloved by butterflies and hummingbirds and are also drought tolerant and, in some zones, are perennial.

Verbena. Gorgeous clusters of flowers in a variety of colors are some of the most easy-to-grow flowers in the garden. They bloom in late spring and love heat and tolerate drought.

Zinnias. A profusion of blooms in a bunch of colors, these flowers are favorites of bees and butterflies and also make great cut flowers.

Marigolds. Merry gold pompoms are not only gorgeous, but they protect your other garden staples from pests.

Gaillardia. These yellow and orange blooms are also called blanket flowers and bloom clear into the start of fall.

Celosia. Plumes of bright color shoot up from these flowers that can get as big as 3 feet tall. It can be a perennial in southern zones.

Portulaca. These little flowers on unique foliage love hot, sunny weather.

Canna. Stunning tropical leaves compete with towering, bright blooms in red, orange, yellow and pink. They need moist soil, but they like hot weather.

Mandevilla. A lush, trailing vine with big, trumpet-shaped blooms in red, pink and white. It grows quickly and can climb more than 10 feet.

Passionflower. Another gorgeous climbing vine, the passionflower is a showstopper. Big, broad purple flowers on a fast-growing vine that needs a sturdy trellis to live well.

Plumbago. Sky-blue flowers top this shrub or vine that's a favorite of butterflies. It can climb to more than 10 feet.

Garden phlox. Round balls of flowers can grow 3-5 feet tall. If you're in a humid climate, look for a mildew-resistant variety.



Get the Grill

A fun twist on the regular backyard barbecue is a buffet of sliders. Get a selection of meats from your local grocer, a variety of buns and a smorgasbord of cheeses, and have a slider party.

CHICKEN SLIDERS

Ground chicken is a great, low-fat substitute for ground beef on your grill. Ground chicken can be seasoned much the same way as ground beef and is perfect with a great barbecue sauce.

TURKEY SLIDERS

Turkey is another great substitute for beef and plays well with fiery seasonings like jalapeno, chili powder and sriracha.

GROUND BEEF

The old classic. Pick a meat with a high fat content to get a burger with a juicy bite; you want around 20%.

CHEESES AND BREADS

Put out a variety of thin-sliced, good-quality cheeses. Swiss, pepper Jack, sharp cheddar, provolone and mozzarella are all excellent choices. You can also look to blue cheese, feta and other nontraditional burger choices.

You also want to pick a



© ADOBE STOCK

variety of buns and rolls. Potato rolls are great, as are Hawaiian bread, wheat rolls for the health-conscious, sesame buns and more. Pretzel buns are tasty, but can also be a little chewy for a slider.

TOP IT OFF

Fresh, crisp lettuce and juicy tomatoes are perfect accessories, as are fresh red onions. You can also offer caramelized onions, grilled

mushrooms and jalapenos, either candied, pickled or fresh. Creamy avocados are also great. You can coat them with a little lemon juice to keep them from turning brown. Don't forget a variety of pickles and crisp bacon, too.

EXPERIMENT WITH CONDIMENTS

Find different kinds of mayonnaise and mustard to

accent your sliders, along with different kinds of ketchup and sauces like sriracha and sandwich toppings.

BARBECUED CHICKEN SLIDERS

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1/2 red onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon hot sauce

- 1 1/2 pounds ground chicken
- 1 tablespoon grill seasoning

1. Melt butter in a skillet and add chopped onions, garlic and tomato paste. Sweat for 5 minutes to soften. Sprinkle in sugar and remove from heat. Cool for 5 minutes, then add Worcestershire and hot sauce and combine. Add the chicken and grill seasoning and combine the burgers well.
2. Form 4 patties. Grill 5-6 minutes per side or until it reaches 165 degrees.

Fresh Summer Salads

Refreshing summer salads are a great way to watch your waistline without giving up any of the flavor. Keep reading for how to make the perfect summer salad.

PICK A GOOD BASE

A great salad starts with a great base. Fresh spinach is an iron-rich choice, while mixed greens provide a variety of flavor and texture. For more, crunch, add lots of chopped cabbage or slivered broccoli.

You can also choose from a variety of lettuces like crunchy iceberg, soft butter lettuce or crisp romaine. Or all of the above. It's your salad and your show.

TOPPINGS

Tiny heirloom tomatoes are colorful, juicy and a traditional part of a salad. You can also turn to other classics, like sliced cucumber, ribbons of carrots and chunks of avocado. If you're feeling more creative, look to fresh corn, curls of paper-thin fresh squash and chopped artichoke hearts.

FRUITS

Fruit is also a great salad topping, either fresh or dried. Of course there are raisins and dried cranberries, but you can also chop fresh



© ADOBE STOCK

grapes, sliced strawberries, fresh blueberries and raspberries. Chop apples for a bit of crunch or segment oranges for a burst of juicy flavor.

PROTEINS

Cheese is a good protein pick, as are beans. Choose canned garbanzos or black beans, rinsed well. Boiled eggs are great, as are thin-sliced beef strips, grilled chicken, grilled shrimp or flakes of fresh fish. See what

your local fish or meat counter has available for the best selection.

SHRIMP AND NECTARINE SALAD

Recipe is from Taste of Home.

Dressing

- 1/3 cup orange juice
- 3 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1 1/2 teaspoons honey
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon

Salad

- 4 teaspoons canola oil, divided
 - 1 cup fresh corn
 - 1 pound uncooked shrimp, 26-30 per pound, peeled and deveined
 - 1/2 teaspoon lemon-pepper seasoning
 - 1/4 teaspoon salt
 - 8 cups torn mixed salad greens
 - 2 medium nectarines, cut into 1-inch pieces
 - 1 cup grape tomatoes, halved
 - 1/2 cup finely chopped red onion
1. In a small bowl, whisk orange juice, vinegar, mustard and honey until blend-

ed. Stir in tarragon.

2. In a large skillet, heat a teaspoon of oil over medium-high heat. Add corn and cook and stir 1-2 minutes or until crisp-tender. Remove from pan.
3. Sprinkle shrimp with lemon pepper and salt. In the same skillet, heat remaining oil over medium-high heat. Add the shrimp and cook, stirring for 3-4 minutes or until shrimp turn pink. Stir in corn.
4. In a large bowl, combine remaining ingredients. Drizzle with 1/3 cup of dressing and toss to coat. Divide among four plates. Top with shrimp mixture and drizzle with remaining dressing. Serve.