

OASIS TIP

"Adding an outdoor kitchen to your home will transform how you entertain with friends and family. After all, enjoying good food is a central part of our lives and it brings people together to create memorable experiences."

Photo: Fire Magic

BRINGING THE INDOORS OUT

How to transform your backyard into the ultimate oasis

BY MICHELLE BOGLE

Flipping through postcard memories, we are smitten with images of charcoal hibachis and third-generation picnic tables. Furnishing a backyard with a simple dining set and cart-style barbeque was once the norm. But spaces have evolved into true extensions of the home, complete with elaborate outdoor kitchens, relaxed living and dining areas, and state-of-the-art entertainment zones. In Southern Ontario, they are spaces meant to be enjoyed from early spring to late fall; ones that bring the comforts and conveniences of the indoors outside.

This summer, skip the long commute to the cottage and staycation at home in your backyard oasis by reimagining the heart of your home. The kitchen houses the essence of family – the place where loved ones gather together to create, share, eat and enjoy. The same is true about your outdoor living space; a fully-functioning and well-equipped outdoor kitchen is one of the best ways to re-create the heart of your home outside.

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“It brings your space to life,” says Karim Riad from Fire Magic, a premier manufacturer of some of the world’s finest American-made outdoor grills and accessories for 80 years. “Adding an outdoor kitchen to your home will transform how you entertain with friends and family. After all, enjoying good food is a central part of our lives and it brings people together to create memorable experiences.”

“When you are selecting a brand of equipment to install in your outdoor kitchen, it’s crucial to think about longevity since this is a long-term investment,” adds Riad. “Our philosophy is that your outdoor kitchen should last as long as your house.”

“By its very nature, an outdoor kitchen is a made-to-measure custom project, which means that all elements are built-in, including the grill, refrigerator, side burner and other accessories. It’s important to choose equipment that stands the test of time to avoid modifying or rebuilding the island structure in the future.”

This includes selecting equipment that will withstand the elements all year round, especially winter. “Our products are constructed from the highest quality, heavy gauge,



Photo: Fire Magic

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appliance-grade 304 stainless steel, which resists oxidation and corrosion.” It’s also essential to invest in manufacturers that pay attention to the details, thus elevating the outdoor cooking experience, like angled interior halogen lights and spring-assisted lids, roller bearing rotisseries, and fully insulated, flush mounted doors and drawers.

Similar to an indoor kitchen, an outdoor kitchen should feature equipment that is customized to the cuisine you enjoy, the type of entertaining that you do, and the way that you cook. High-end outfitting demands customization to the fullest extent.

“Not only do we offer a wide array of products to choose from, including gas, charcoal and electric, but many features are customizable as well. Homeowners can opt for a grill with a built-in window to enhance its look and functionality or choose a solid lid. They can also select the types of burners they wish – from cast stainless to infrared – and digital or analogue thermometers as well. The ability to customize is a real benefit.”

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Just as the traditional kitchen has space to prep, cook, clean, store and serve, so should your outdoor cookery. This includes running water for a sink, an appropriately sized grill with a side burner to cook the dishes you enjoy most, garbage receptacles, cold storage for beverages, dry cupboard storage and drawers for spices, cooking tools and other ingredients, and counter space for prep and serving.

It's more than just a barbeque; it's a complete kitchen. And, if properly designed, it will not only elevate your culinary experience, but also allow more time to mingle with guests and impress them with the space you've created.

Building an outdoor kitchen, while essential, is only part of a backyard oasis – there are other elements to consider as well, like the deck that accentuates your investment. And, just as quality and longevity are key when planning an open-air kitchen, the same is true about decks. That's why many outdoor projects feature alternative decking materials, such as PVC and composite, for their low maintenance and range of colour options.



OASIS TIP

An outdoor structure adds a whole new level of luxury to your backyard, as it defines a protected space for cooking, dining or relaxing.

"Instead of choosing a traditional wood option, like cedar, which requires maintenance and staining, homeowners are investing in alternative surfaces, which offer a realistic look and great durability," says Robert Hodichak, Senior Designer at The Deck Store, a premier deck and outdoor living supply and build company. "Many of these materials are designed to withstand a lifetime. In fact, you'll probably want to change the design before you need to change the product."

The expanse of materials from which to construct your oasis has fostered a trend of eclectic design. A great way to add interest to any deck, aerial structure or privacy screen is to incorporate composite wood with metal, natural stone or even frosted glass for a stunning visual effect.

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cooking, dining or relaxing, and it can extend the season into the cooler months that bring promise of an Ontario winter. But don't feel limited to solid roof structures, shingled roofs, cabanas or pavilions – there are many new products available that offer complete versatility and control.

"There is a trend towards Arcadia roofs, or louvered roof systems, in most backyard retreats," says Hodichak.

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After a long day, a soak in a pool or hot tub is a must-have luxury. But if you are short on space or are averse to regular maintenance, a water feature is an ideal way to infuse your outdoor oasis with calm, serene sounds.

“With this type of enclosure, you can be sheltered from the elements or simply press a button to let in fresh air and the sun. This type of versatility is very appealing to homeowners – especially ones where an attached solid roof structure may block the sunlight from flowing inside their home.”

Even if you have a deck or an outdoor structure, a patio or walkway is a wonderful complement to any property, as they are functional and visually appealing too.

“In many high-end homes, it’s common to see natural stone used in patios

and walkways,” says Mike Flint from International Landscaping in Milton, a design-build-maintenance company servicing residential and commercial properties for nearly 30 years. “Home-owners choose natural stone for its look, as it’s rugged yet modern, especially when it’s square cut and laid in a linear fashion.”

Thoughtful plant selections and careful arrangements accentuate structural elements and add colour and texture. The key is to choose plants that are low maintenance and appealing year round. According to Flint, there are many perennials and shrubs that are easy to care for, including False Spirea, Coral Bells, Barberry and Pagoda Dogwood, to name just a few. To ensure year-round



OASIS TIP

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interest, you should mix plantings that flower throughout the year, such as Serviceberry in the spring, Purple Coneflower in the summer, Blue Flag Iris in the fall, and Feather Reed Grass in the winter. “There are even some varieties of plants that drop their leaves in the winter, but have different bark characters and textures that continue to provide visual impact,” adds Flint. These varieties include Paperbark Maple, which is a tree that has cinnamon-brown bark that exfoliates in thin strips, or Dogwood, which can have red or yellow bark, depending on the species.

After a long day, a soak in a pool or hot tub is a must-have luxury. But if you are short on space or are averse to regular maintenance, a water feature is an ideal way to infuse your outdoor oasis with calm, serene sounds. Linear water spouts and sheer descent water features are very much on-trend.

A fully-realized outdoor space requires a fire feature. There is no better way to add ambiance and elegance than the warmth of a hearth. Stand-alone fireplaces are currently de rigueur and can define

an outdoor room by acting as a focal point. Poolside fire bowls, lanterns and fire tables can also add a flourish of grandeur to any open-air design. American Fyre Designs, manufactured by the same company as Fire Magic, offers a full selection of elegant and durable outdoor fire features to suit any decor.

To enjoy your backyard well after the sun sets, it’s important to include lighting for both ambiance and utility. For outdoor kitchens, this includes good task lighting over and inside the grill and work spaces, while dining and conversation areas can be accentuated with wall-mount downlights or dimmable electric lamps for a relaxed mood. Solar-powered or low-voltage accent lights add drama to surrounding landscapes, patios, decks, stairs and walkways.

“A beautifully furnished, pleasantly lit, accessorized space is what brings family and friends together outdoors.”

Without the right furniture, you've just got a beautiful space with nowhere to luxuriate. Contemporary garden furnishings offer more choice than ever before. According to Jim Edick of Southern Living Design, a high-end outdoor furniture and design company carrying some of the most notable collections in the industry (including Cane-Line, Gloster, Lava Heat, TUCCI, Brown Jordan and Dekko), minimal, matching options are

out, while an array of furnishings in vibrant colours, shapes, sizes and materials are in.

“The same design principles apply to your exterior spaces as they do your interiors – this is a great opportunity to mix, match and blend. With homeowners opting to build outdoor kitchens, there are many options for outdoor dining. Traditional cast iron and wood furniture is met by the durability

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the focal spaces to create secondary niches for conversation and relaxation. After all, a thoughtful design will ensure that your outdoor oasis is inviting and maintenance free for years to come.

When it comes to accessorizing, more is best. Think in layers, like lit lanterns for ambiance, resort-style parasols and shade structures for a touch of luxury, outdoor music for atmosphere, planters for added colour, fire bowls for warmth, and weather-resistant pillows and throws for comfort, pattern, texture and fun. Edick says it best: “A beautifully furnished, pleasantly lit, accessorized space is what brings family and friends together outdoors.”

OASIS TIP

When choosing outdoor furnishings, quality materials and design are key. Look for weather-resistant fabrics, marine-grade hardware, architectural interest and strong construction.



Photo: Southern Living Design

Photo: Elizabeth Interiors

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of power-coated aluminum, pumice tops that look like concrete, and glass. Customers are even switching up their chairs to create a mix and match look, as each piece has elements of another that tie the look together.”

When choosing outdoor furnishings, quality materials and design are key. Look for weather-resistant fabrics, marine-grade hardware, architectural interest and strong construction. It's also important to see beyond

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO TURN YOUR VISION OF A BACKYARD OASIS INTO A REALITY, PLEASE CONTACT OR VISIT:

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