

ENHANCING LIFE AT HOME

Certainly an outdoor living area adds value to your home, but the real value is in time – as in quality time! These unique living spaces are growing in popularity as homeowners seek new ways to relax and enhance time spent at home.

Designing an outdoor living space isn't that much different from designing one indoors – everyone has their own style and vision. Some things to think about as you begin planning your space:

Identify goals and make a “big picture” plan that includes a budget.

Match the outdoor room to your home's architectural style.

Build interesting entrances, including gates, pergolas and pathways.

Spruce up a structure, whether the house, a garage or a shed, with plants and other attractive details.

Build rock-solid hardscaping to give your space definition and dimension.

Add a water feature that suits the style and scale of your space.

Be sure to budget for landscaping.

TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR OUTDOOR AREA, PROFESSIONALS ALSO RECOMMEND THAT YOU:

- Establish traffic patterns by including formal walkways, creating shifts in hardscape materials, or planting shrubs or trees to establish corners and borders.
- Add a fire source. A source of fire draws people. If you have the space and budget, consider a permanent version; if not, investigate portable fire pits, which provide flexibility and affordability.
- Create a focal point using one element such as a sculpture or a water feature. Such elements give the eye something to land on; the rest of the furnishings and accents support that piece.
- Include seating options such as benches and chairs. Include as many choices as you can in your outdoor living space to maximize your enjoyment of it.
- Establish a sense of discovery using a path. For instance, a gentle curving path is instantly transformed into a walkway that encourages discovery and exploration in the garden.
- Strategically shield the view if you want to add privacy. Shrubs or dwarf trees are an effective way to accomplish this, as are containers planted with vines climbing a trellis.
- Connect to the indoors. Outdoor living spaces that are easily accessible to indoor rooms are the most likely to get used. Locate your space in a spot that's in a traffic pattern or in a place that offers refuge, such as off the master bedroom or living room.

Follow these guidelines and your outdoor living area will not only be functional, it will be beautiful *and* a place you'll enjoy for years to come.

