



Living Outside

Enjoy those sweet summer nights in your perfectly-designed outdoor space

Think beyond your indoor living space. During the summer months your outdoor living space becomes a valuable priority used for many functions. Think beyond just barbecuing or relaxing in your outdoor retreat. Whatever your purpose may be, choose furnishings, materials, and arrangements to fit your style.

Transform an outdoor porch into an observatory with comfortable seating and a telescope. Plan a space for cozy dinners or larger dinner parties. Take privacy into consideration when planning. Options range from planters with foliage or folding screens, to draperies, roll-down shades, or even shutters. When arranging the furniture, make sure the seating is close enough for easy conversation. There should be a minimum of three feet between furniture for a clear walkway to the entrance to your home.

In order to enjoy your outdoor living space and not be dependent upon weather conditions, you can plan appropriate cover-ups. Awnings, umbrellas, a tented roof, pergola, or even large trees can all prevent the unpredictable weather from ruining your ability to use your outdoor space. Plan ahead to protect your space and to get the most out of your investment.

Place an outdoor structure where it will get indirect light for part of the day. There are umbrellas available that do not require a dining table for support, creating instant shade. Keep away the sun and rain with a retractable awning. There are many synthetic materials -- offered in a variety of colors and styles -- that will weather the elements beautifully, as well as enable the space to look cozy and inviting. You can even waterproof your own fabrics with iron-on vinyl available at fabric stores. Natural fabrics do tend to fade from the elements, so try to use them only in covered areas.

Decide how your space will be used. This will dictate what furnishings you will need to make your outdoor space function for your specific needs. If you want a space to lounge in and read a book, a cushioned sofa or chair is a definite must-have. I like a porch swing or

glider chair as well to just fall asleep in on a breezy summer day. A fan is always a nice touch, along with an outdoor lamp for reading on quiet evenings at home. Pick furniture that is indicated for coastal outdoor durability if living by the beach. If your outdoor space is covered and not exposed to severe elements, furniture choices do not have to be as weather hardy. Use accent colors on cushions, pillows, shades, table linens, rugs, and foliage to bring your indoor color scheme to your outdoor space.

Outdoor furniture can be extremely expensive. It's an investment that you need to educate yourself on prior to purchasing. For your furniture to last, consider the material it is made of and the weather it will need to withstand.

There is aluminum that is durable, lightweight and rustproof. It comes in wrought- or cast-iron forms. Iron is great for windy spaces.

It's heavier and less expensive than aluminum, but not ideal for coastal spaces as it tends to rust. Wicker is beautiful, but must be covered unless it's synthetic all-weather wicker. Outdoor wood furniture requires lots of maintenance with a yearly coat of paint or varnish. Cushions need to be waterproof and mildew resistant for not only the covers, but the inserts as well. Painted furniture is designed for the outdoors and, keep in mind, enamel paints last the longest.

Whatever your purpose may be, just remember; you want the space to be inviting. Use colorful containers filled with plants for texture. Add some mood with subtle lighting and candles in windproof hurricanes. Include a fire pit for ambience and lighting as well. Soften with fabrics on pillows, cushions, and gauzy drapes. And most importantly, make lasting memories with those you love on those sweet summer nights we all treasure. ■



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