

Creating an Outdoor Room

Article courtesy of HGTV.com

Whether you have a big backyard or a tiny patio, the key to designing for outdoor living is implementing your plan in steps, says Elyse Santoro, a Miami-based interior designer/decorator. "It doesn't have to happen all at once, and it doesn't have to be overwhelming or cost a fortune," she says. Start increasing your home's square footage today with our budget-friendly outdoor decorating tips.

Where to Put Your Outdoor Room

First, go *inside* your house and check out the views looking out. Placing the room in a good relationship to the house helps give the feeling that your outdoor room is "an extension of your home," Santoro says. "Make sure... you have easy access to get there," she says, whether or not it's physically connected to the house. An outdoor room can include anything from an attached, screened-in porch to a gazebo to a landscaped area with a bench. If it's an independent area, such as a gazebo, create a passageway with foliage or hardscaping to visually connect it to the house. "You want to erase the fact that you've gone outside," says Atlanta-based landscape designer Patricia Thernell. She advises using the same flooring material outside as inside, or using plants to frame the doorway to your outdoor room.

Defining Your Outdoor Space

"The best way to define an outdoor room is by the activity that will take place in it," says Mary Donovan, an interior and landscape designer in Atlanta. Donovan interviews homeowners on what they plan to do in their outdoor spaces. Often the answer includes several purposes such as entertaining, family dining, playing games and reading. Figure out if you need one large space or several smaller rooms, each with its own purpose.

Multiple outdoor rooms don't necessarily require acres of land, Donovan says. Postage-stamp sized front lawns and narrow side yards can be landscaped to be rooms in themselves and not just passageways. "It can be a shady quiet, meandering space with hydrangeas, hostas, moss and a dripping wall fountain, and other plants trained to grow vertically up against the house or on a lattice," Donovan says.

An outdoor room has to be functional, but it also has to be engaging or you'll never use it. Santoro asks clients to think about places they've traveled to that they absolutely love. "If they say they love Tuscany or the vineyards in northern California, I ask them to remember what it felt like there and to create their outdoor space with elements of that place."

Water Features

Landscape designers, interior decorators and architects all agree: Water is one of the most important elements in an outdoor room. The sound of water "really creates a serene setting," says Thernell. Even if you're creating a room for entertaining and dining rather than meditating, "it's still nice to hear the splash when you're sitting around the table." But you don't have to spring for a pond or waterfall. A container water garden or a tabletop fountain works perfectly, says Santoro.

Flooring

Since flooring defines a space, put down some kind of hardscaping, whether it's a deck or a stone floor or a concrete slab. If your outdoor room has a floor of grass, "you'll never go out there," says Santoro. "If there's no floor it doesn't feel like a room." Concrete flooring can be stamped to resemble flagstone or brick, or stained in myriad colors. Plus, it's less expensive than a stone floor.

Fireplaces

A cozy fire or fireplace is becoming a staple for outdoor rooms, because a hearth can extend the season of your outdoor room by several months. Consider two-sided fireplaces or portable fire pits.

Plants

Plants soften hard edges (such as concrete flooring) and add a sense of life, warmth and comfort. Santoro, who's also an expert in feng shui, likes jade plants, miniature orange trees and potted philodendron in sheltered areas, and pines and bamboo to define outdoor areas. Or, choose plants based on the feelings you want to evoke in the space. For example, a meditative outdoor room works best in shade, surrounded with ferns and hosta with ligustrum to define borders. Left to grow naturally, a ligustrum hedge looks woody and informal, or you can trim it to define a more formal outdoor room.



This Moroccan indoor-outdoor space is a colorful, comfy addition to the homeowners' Spanish Revival home. A lounge and dining area is surrounded by terracotta walls, custom string curtains and cheery blue accents.

Tips on Creating your Outdoor Room

Article courtesy of HPBA® (Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association)

Sitting comfortably with friends or family in the backyard on a cool summer evening, with a warm fire and dinner sizzling on the grill, is pure pleasure. It is also the precise reason why people throughout North America are turning their yards and decks into inviting outdoor living spaces. People are extending the comfort and luxury of their homes into the great outdoors, and the result is the popular trend called the “outdoor room.”

POPULARITY YIELDS FULL-FEATURED PRODUCTS

As consumer interest in the outdoor room continues to grow, hearth, patio and barbecue manufacturers are developing stylish, full-featured products to enhance the comfort, convenience and pleasure of entertaining or relaxing outside, no matter the climate or season. Manufacturers now have extensive product lines that can help extend a home’s living space both literally and visually. There are barbecues and fireplaces in all sizes and styles, from simple to high-tech, and plush (or sleek) patio furniture and accessories to help set any mood.

OUTDOOR ROOM BASICS

Anyone can easily create an outdoor room. In general, the concept encompasses a grilling and eating area, pulled together with a hearth product, such as a fireplace, firepit or chiminea. Some outdoor rooms are similar to indoor kitchens, with expansive counter space and full food preparation areas complete with sinks and plumbing. It’s even possible to add a dishwasher and a refrigerator to make trips inside to clean up or grab cold drink a distant memory. Other outdoor rooms take the concept further with the addition of pizza ovens, cocktail bars, fountains, trellises, patio heaters, spas and pools. Landscaping, lighting and sculptures are additional elements that can help create a cohesive feeling within an outdoor space.

Pulling together an outdoor room is less about the quantity of product and more about creating an outdoor living area that meets a homeowner’s idea of comfort and relaxation. Here are some simple steps to help create the perfect outdoor room:

- DETERMINE THE IDEAL USE OF THE OUTDOOR SPACE.** Use a notepad to jot down ideas about how the space will be used in all of its applications, from entertaining to relaxing.
- CREATE A WISH LIST.** The increase in the number of magazine and newspaper articles has created an abundance of information on outdoor rooms or outdoor living spaces. Clip or print pictures and put them into a notebook.

- REVIEW THE HOME'S STYLE.** It's important to have an understanding of a home's architectural style when creating an outdoor room so that the outdoor spaces accentuates the home's indoor spaces. There are products available for every taste and style.
- VISIT A SPECIALTY RETAILER.** A specialty retailer is a key partner in creating an outdoor room. In addition to expertise and products, a specialty retailer can offer key insights about what's available in a particular area and what works best in a certain climate. Take your notebook and your wish list with you.
- RESEARCH THE PRODUCTS.** After obtaining the details from a specialty retailer, go online to review products and manufacturer information.
- CONSIDER FURNITURE, FIRE AND FOOD.** These are key elements in every well-designed outdoor room. Position the fireplace as the focal point, blend in the cooking and eating areas and then consider the furniture.
- THINK FOUNDATION.** Stone patios, retaining walls, fences and decks are basic foundation elements.
- DRAW A PLAN.** The best way to achieve the desired end result is to sketch out a plan. Don't worry about picture-perfect drawings – it's the general idea that counts!
- BUILD THE SPACE.** Have fun putting the space together. Consider multiple conversation areas for enhanced functionality and interest.
- USE LANDSCAPING AS AN ACCESSORY.** Carefully placed trees and shrubs can add important texture and appeal to an outdoor room. Select plants that change with the season, offering different colors, blooms or scents depending on the time of year.
- ADD THE FURNISHINGS.** Select comfortable patio furniture that invites people to settle in for an extended period of time. Regardless of style, outdoor furnishings are available to add beauty and character, creating the atmosphere of a lush oasis. In addition to tables and chairs for the eating area, consider chaise lounges, deep seaters, couches, conversation and side tables.
- CONSIDER LIGHTING.** To extend the amount of time spent outdoors, consider lighting for pathways, around pools, or to accentuate landscaping.
- DECORATIVE DETAILS** such as an attractive table or a favorite work of art can help turn a backyard patio into a stunning outdoor room.
- TAKE IT IN STAGES** Outdoor rooms can be created over any period of time to accommodate large wish lists or limited budgets.