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Life on the Outside

What you need to make your outdoor area feel like a living room

By Erik J. Martin | CTW Features

If you want to enjoy the great outdoors this summer, you don't need to travel beyond your own backyard. Simply bring all the comforts of the indoors to your patio, deck or other outdoor area via furniture, appliances and other amenities designed for alfresco enjoyment. Then, kick back and enjoy the sunshine or moonlight in style.

"No matter where you live in the country, spending time outside is a valued aspect of our lives. And it's becoming increasingly more important to have a nice outdoor living space to enjoy the weather whenever possible," says Marisa Salas of Showhomes Coral Gables in Coral Gables, Fla. "Having an outdoor living area is a great way to make your home feel bigger without having to do major construction, and it can significantly add to your home's resale value if you're looking to sell."

Plus, spending time outside has many health and mood-enhancing benefits stemming from increased relaxation, activity, fresh air, sunshine and bonding time spent with family and friends, notes Catherine Clemens, licensed landscape architect and principal with Clemens & Associates, Inc. in Santa Fe, N.M.

"We believe this outdoor living trend is becoming more popular due to the rebound in the economic and housing markets," Clemens says. "It can also be attributed to advancements in the durability and style of outdoor-rated materials and exposure from social media channels like Instagram and Pinterest."

The ideal spot to stage an outdoor living area is just past the back door, many experts agree.

"Many people like to utilize areas that are close to the home so that food and beverages don't have to travel far from the kitchen," says Benjamin Paciello, general manager of BoConcept Madison Avenue in New York City.

Clemens concurs.

"Typically, it's best placed right off the house for convenience and fluidity between indoor and outdoor living spaces," says Clemens. "However, sometimes a getaway destination, pavilion or enclosure hideaway positioned further from the house for privacy can provide a welcome retreat. This concept is well-suited for relaxation areas like a hot tub or hammock area."

Paciello's priorities for an outdoor living area are simple.

"Comfortable seating is vital. Second is a good dining area. Third is a shade element to shield you from the sun," he says. "Everything after that is an added bonus - like a grill, fire pit, portable lighting, and outdoor sound system."

Joe Raboine, Atlanta-based design and training specialist with Belgard, says several notable trends are underfoot in outdoor living

design. One is creating a well-appointed outdoor kitchen equipped with a grill, side burners, fridge and bar.

"In addition, wicker, wood and metal-based furniture with deep seating and very thick and sun-resistant fabrics are popular. People are also installing all types of hanging beds and swings and even creating outdoor enclosed showers," says Raboine.

Clemens has observed a gravitation toward plush conversational furniture sets such as sectional sofas and club chairs.

"Ample outdoor pillows, rugs and throws are being used to create a living room-like space for entertaining or relaxing, too," adds Clemens.

Wood or natural gas-fueled fire pits remain hot, along with fire tables and fire bowls.

"Quality outdoor lighting is also in demand, in the form of decorative string lights, uplighting around nearby landscaping, and hanging lanterns with LED-style flameless lights," says Rhianna Miller, outdoor design expert for Lakewood, N.J.-headquartered RubberMulch. "Stamped or stained concrete patios are on the rise as well, which give the look of more expensive stones and add drama to the design."

Added touches that can enhance the outdoor experience include an outdoor fan to promote airflow and discourage insects, a water element like a small, recirculating fountain, and an infrared heater for when the weather gets chilly.

Clemens recommends budgeting at least \$5,000 for a snazzy outdoor living space.

"Basic elements can be completed by a savvy do-it-yourselfer," she says, "but I recommend hiring a professional designer to create a plan and maximize the usage of your space and resources."

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Welcome Home

A DIY Guide to Repainting Your Front Door

By Lisa Iannucci | CTW Features

When you walk up to your front door, is it dirty? Dingy? In need of repair? Does it scream 'go away' instead of 'welcome'? Give your front door a well-deserved facelift by repainting it.

"Your front door is the portal to your home and should stand out with a harmonious color and signify a sense of character and beauty," says Scott Harris, COO and co-founder of Building Construction Group in Los Angeles.

Harris suggests painting it a complimentary, but opposite color to the home's trim and the easiest way to find out what is an opposite and yet complimentary color is to look at a color wheel, found at many home improvement stores.

"For example, if your home is in the warm beige tones, look to the deep blues on the color wheel," he says. "Or, if your home is in the green tones, have fun and try a deep burgundy or wine-colored paint. It's a place to be bold and have fun."

However, be careful about picking a dark color. "If you pick a dark color, such as a black or dark blue, it can cause a door to warp during a hot summer day and may ruin your warranty," Harris says. "On the hottest day, the sun is beating on the dark color and absorbing the heat. However, on the flip side of the door, it's cool. These indifferent temperatures can cause a door to warp."

Remember to test a paint sample before repainting the entire door. You can either tape a paint chip to the door and see how it looks or purchase small cans of paint samples and paint a small section of the door. "Look at it all times of the day as the natural lighting will affect the color throughout the day," Harris says.

Once you have selected and purchased a gallon of your favorite color, it's time to get to work. "Wood doors should be sanded and if they are showing signs of wear, you may need to apply some wood filler," says William Lee, senior project manager at Taconic Builders in New York City. "This all is very easy to do as long as you are patient and take your time. If there is damage to the door remove it and, depending on how bad it is, it may require some carpentry. Apply wood filler, sand the area smooth and let dry."

After the wood has dried, it's time to add primer. First, remove all of the hardware. You can either remove the door from the hinges before applying the primer and paint or leave it where it is.

"When you're happy with the door prep, simply roll on the highest quality exterior-based primer available using a very low nap roller," Harris says. "The paint stores will typically carry better primers than available at large commercial home stores. Have your paint store add some tint to the primer. If you use a standard white primer under and the door shrinks or moves, the white primer will show."

Don't trust your steady hand to paint around the hinges and door hardware. "Take the time to fully cover them with painters tape and



when done, peel off the tape and you will look like a pro," Harris suggests.

Repainting a door is typically a one-day project. "On a nice summer day, it can easily be done in a few hours," Harris says. "Your front door is not only symbolic, but one of the most iconic visuals of a home, so why not make it special? Repainting a door is a great project that makes an immeasurable visual impact."

It's also the first thing that your visitors see. "It says a lot about the home and reflects upon you the homeowner," Lee says.

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Dressing Up Your Front Porch for Summer

Greet guests the minute they arrive with décor that says "You're welcome here!"

By Nancy Mattia | CTW Features

Decorating your front porch now that spring is finally here is a great way to underscore the season's theme—a time of awakening and rebirth. From painting the front door a cheerful color to DIYing a flower container, there are easy ways to give this exterior focal point a makeover. Try some of these simple ideas to get your porch in shape for the season.

Clean the porch

Start with the basics: Scrub the floor, wash the windows, and store snow shovels in the garage. The less cluttered the porch, the better it will look.

Set out pretty flower pots

The classic way to dress up a front porch is with colorful, lush flowering plants in pots. For a spring feel, choose brightly colored containers that work nicely with your front door color, says Leah Gomberg, owner of Sweet Life By Design, a home-staging company in Maplewood, New Jersey. "For a more dramatic

look, try a pedestal container," she says. "Also, think about grouping containers and using plants in a variety of heights."

Pick seasonal flowers

There's no shortage of spectacular spring blooms, including hydrangeas, tulips, peonies, Queen Anne's lace, daffodils, daisies, magnolias, and geraniums. Choose by shape, color, and personality (magnolias are lush and romantic, daisies are perky and cute).

Choose fresh over faux

While you could use artificial flowers to

decorate, why not go with fresh blooms to better represent spring's themes? To keep the flowers from drying out too quickly, stick stems in individual floral water tubes which, when filled with water, act like mini vases to keep flowers moist.

Paint the front door

"If you want to make a big change," says Gomberg, "give the door a new coat of paint in a spring color like aqua, lilac, or light green." It's an easy way to instantly boost your home's curb appeal.

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PORCH

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Paint a bench or rocker, too

Give your porch's bench or rocker a spring awakening by painting it a gorgeous new shade. "The color you use depends on the color of the door," says Gomberg, who also suggests adding a colorful throw pillow or two to the bench and chair to make them even more inviting.

Hang an umbrella wreath

Got a colorful umbrella you're not using anymore? Fill it with tulips, the quintessential spring flower, to underscore the saying "April showers bring May flowers." Close the umbrella shut, position it upside-down (the handle should be pointed up), and arrange the flowers within. Tie a pretty ribbon around the middle of the umbrella and it's ready to be hung on a nail on your front door.

Showcase rain boots

Repurpose those yellow rain boots your kids have outgrown (or buy from a thrift shop), and set them on the porch filled with your favorite spring flowers. If using fresh blooms, put them in floral water tubes and stabilize them in the boots with newspaper or tissue paper.

Get a rug

Make your porch feel like an extension of your living room when you place a brightly colored rug front and center. Get one that's made for outdoor use. If a rug isn't in your budget, consider a new entry mat.

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Gardens Gone to Pots and Boxes

The latest trends in container gardens and raised beds

By Erik J. Martin | CTW Features

Homeowners with a yen for growing plants, flowers, fruits and vegetables don't have to break new ground — literally. They can follow time-tested advice and make matters simple by gardening above ground in boxes and containers.

Box gardening within raised beds over grass or soil offers the advantage of letting you create the ideal new soil environment within an above-ground wooden, metal or plastic frame that you can make yourself or assemble from a kit. They also drain more efficiently than in-ground gardens and require less kneeling and bending, depending on their height. What's more, you can extend your growing season by planting earlier because the soil warms up sooner than if it were below ground.

Gardening in containers, meanwhile, offers portability and flexibility.

"If you're living in a place with minimal space, container gardens are great alternative to traditional in-ground gardening. They're perfect for patios, balconies, porches, windows, doorsteps or even for adding pops of color in existing garden beds," says Amy Enfield, PhD, consumer horticulturalist with Marysville, Ohio-based Scotts Miracle-Gro. "They add a lot of character and beauty to any space, and are an easy way to enhance your home's curb appeal."

Additionally, "with container growing, you can bring the plants inside during wintertime and bring them back out when weather is favorable," says Andy Lopez, CEO of Malibu, Calif.-based Invisible Gardener Inc. "You can also easily change the look, since it's really simple to just replant in a different container."

Kim Davidson, landscape designer at Mulhall's in Omaha, Neb., says raised bed and container gardening work great in a climate zone like hers, which experiences four seasons.

"In the early spring, we start with cold-tolerant flowers, like pansies, and other design elements like birch poles, moss, and grapevine. Then we transition into tropical plants for the summer, ornamental grasses and perennials in the fall, and, for the holidays, mixes of fresh-cut evergreens, redtwig dogwood, lights and ornaments," says Davidson.

The good news is that you can grow nearly any flowers, succulents, herbs, shrubs, vegetables or fruits in containers or planter boxes.

"The container should be at least 14 inches wide and have deep enough soil volume for root development," says Tim Duffin with Ball Horticultural Company in West Chicago, Ill. He adds that you should carefully consider the spacing requirements of each plant and follow the instructions on the plant's tag or container.

Today, containers are available in a variety of traditional and innovative options:

Terracotta pots, a time-tested favorite "that's ideal for drought-loving plants," says Enfield, who recommends glazed terracotta, which

doesn't dry out as fast.

Concrete and stone containers, which are extra-durable but heavier and more expensive.

Metal containers, "which are great for adding a modern feel to your landscape, but best for plants that can withstand heat and drought," Enfield notes.

Coco-lined metal planters, commonly found as hanging baskets or window boxes (a.k.a. "hayracks").

Resin planters, which offer the look of stone without the weight. "These are great for decks and stairs, and they're also frost- and crack-proof," says Enfield.

Wood containers, which provide a natural look that blends well in a garden setting. "They're durable and weather-resistant but break down over time and can be quite heavy once filled with potting mix," adds Enfield.

Natural/biodegradable containers, including CowPots (containing 100% composted and odor-free cow manure), Jiffy-Pots (made from Canadian sphagnum peat moss and wood pulp) and fiber pots.

Fabric containers like Smart Pots, which expel heat to keep roots cooler during hot weather and prevent root circling.

The latest trends in raised bed gardening include:

Closer placement of the bed to the home's exterior to enhance a patio, deck or outdoor living

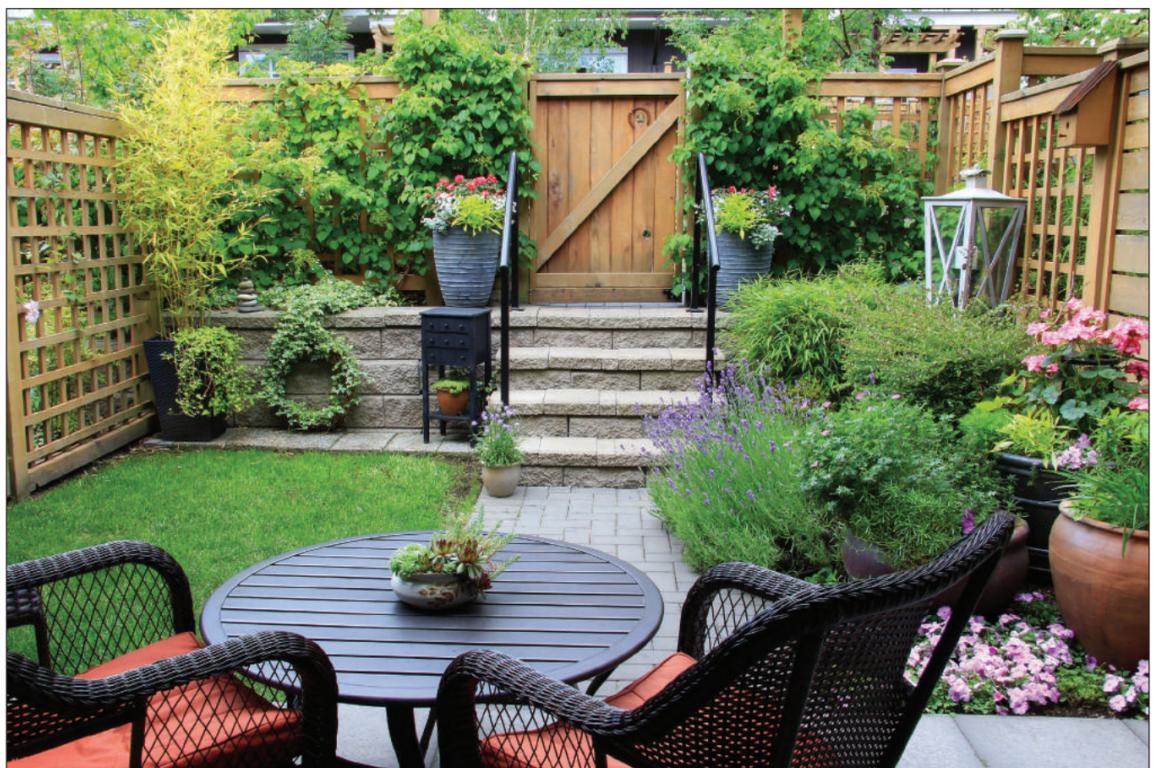
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Tips for Working With a Landscape Professional

When you have gardening goals, it's easy to get overwhelmed. Whether you were born with a green thumb or not, it pays to enlist the help of a landscape architect/professional who can guide you through the growing season and beyond.

"There are no landscape or gardening projects too big or small to involve an expert," says Kim Davidson with Mulhall's. "A landscape professional can look at the big picture and how each detail fits in the overall theme of your exterior design. They can not only provide expertise in plants and design principles, but they can make the whole process easier, too – from design to installation to maintenance."

Theodore Beasley, a London-based professional landscaper, agrees.

"They can choose the right plants that go well together for your project. They know what materials to use and how to combine them in a way so it looks good and natural," Beasley says.

For best results in collaborating with a landscape professional, Davidson recommends answering these questions together:

- Who will be using the space, and how will the space be used?
- What type of mood is desired?
- Where will the space be viewed from most often?
- Are there certain types of plants that should be included?
- What level of maintenance will be required?
- Will this design/plan work with my budget?

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Don't Step on the Cracks

Fix-it solutions for cracked driveways, patios and sidewalks

By Lisa Iannucci | CTW Features

If your driveway, patio or sidewalk is starting to show signs of wear and tear and the cracks are making it look more like a jigsaw puzzle, it might be time to repair it. Or should you replace it?

First, it's important to understand why paved surfaces start to crack. "It's all about maintenance," says Lee Collins, concrete technical expert with Sakrete, a manufacturer of paving materials and repair and maintenance products. "You can't just set out a concrete driveway or an asphalt driveway and never seal it or never maintain it, because it's going to go bad. Erosion, what's underneath the

soil, even burrowing animals, can also cause a small washout which will cause it to crack."

Weather is also a factor. "In New York, for example, de-icing salts will degrade and eat up concrete, so if you don't keep your driveways clean, the salt will ruin it," he says.

Paved surfaces also are susceptible to damage from heavy rain and snow runoff.

Deciding whether to repair or replace will

depend on its condition. "If your concrete driveway has a lot of cracks, then it would probably be best to use a jackhammer," Collins says. "If you try patching a driveway that's in such dilapidated condition, you're going to end up doing repairs over again because some products peel from the surface."

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CRACKS

From Page 7

Collins suggests cleaning cement with a pressure washer to test its condition. "If it is a hairline crack and a pressure washer hardly does any damage, then we would probably use a bond, or a flo-coat on it," he says. "If it leaves a wide enough crack, there are other cement products that go to two inches in thickness."

Moderate cement repairs can be done as a DIY project. "The most time is going to be in the prep than it is to patch it," Collins says. "If it's not that severe, then an average homeowner who can handle a trowel can do it."

According to Justin Smith, the owner of All State Paving in Poughkeepsie, New York, cracks in asphalt aren't as easy to repair. "You can put a thin layer of hot tar over it or replace the whole thing," he says. "You can do some repairs on your own, but if you can lift the asphalt cracks up in your hand, it's best to call in a professional."

Collins urges homeowners to not fall for door-to-door scams from pavers looking to pawn off extra sealant for asphalt driveways. "If your driveway is in good shape, then extra sealant can even help to protect it from the elements and keep a lot of things from getting underneath it," he says. "However, sealing over cracks isn't going to do any good though because the cracks will just come through again."

The National Asphalt Paving Association says that asphalt that is "left over" from another job will be too cool to make a good pavement for your home.

If you are hiring a repair professional, Collins says to make sure they're bonded and have insurance. Bonded means that a company has secured money that is available to you, the homeowner, in case you file a claim against the company. "Get everything in writing," he says. "If something goes wrong, then you have a means to get back in touch with them to have it fixed. You need a company that's going to be honest with you because some companies just want to rip everything out and start all over again."

Your driveway is one of the first things that someone sees when they come to your home and it's important to make a good first impression. Taking care of your driveway should be just as important as mowing your lawn and trimming the hedges.

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Asphalt surfaces are more difficult to repair, and the best option often is to apply a thin layer of tar.



Weather, erosion, what's underneath the soil, lack of maintenance and even burrowing animals can cause cracks in concrete.

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How to banish mosquitoes from your yard

Time spent in the backyard on spring and summer afternoons and evenings contributes heavily to the popularity of these times of year. Many homeowners go to great lengths to make their outdoor living spaces as luxurious as possible, only to be bothered by uninvited and bothersome guests: mosquitoes.

Homeowners can employ several measures to prevent mosquitoes from invading their backyards this spring and summer.

Remove standing water
Stagnant water is an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes, so homeowners must be diligent in their efforts to remove standing water around their properties. Mosquitoes can breed in bird baths, pets' water bowls and empty plant pots that collect rain water. Routinely tipping these items and refilling them with fresh water can prevent mosquito infestations, protecting both humans and pets alike.

Inspect property for hidden pockets of water
While bird baths, pet bowls and kiddie pools are easy to find, homeowners may be unknowingly hosting mosquito breeding

grounds elsewhere on their properties. For example, tarps used to cover pools, automobiles or grills that are not tightly secured can fold up, creating pockets where rain water can collect and give mosquitoes somewhere to breed. Mosquitoes also may use gutters to breed, so homeowners should routinely inspect and clean their gutters during spring and summer.

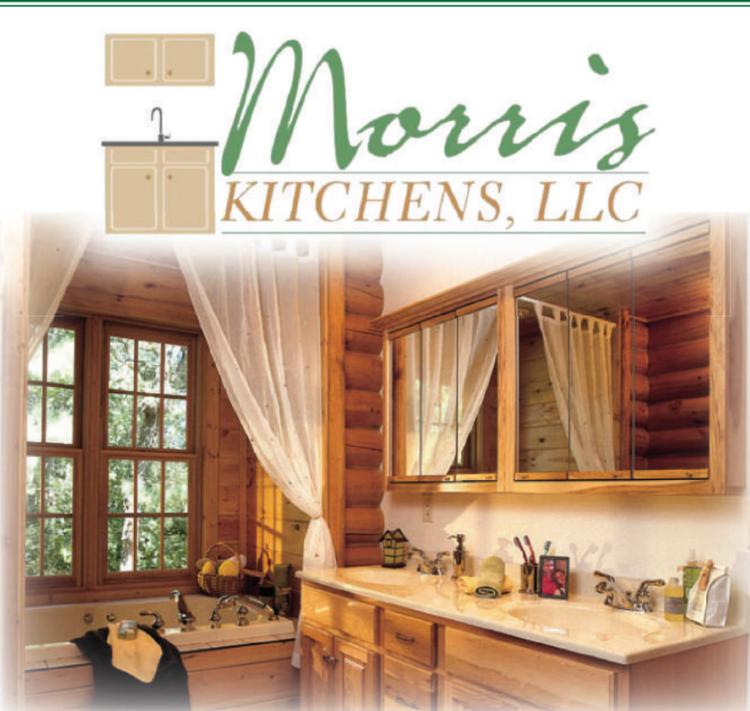
Keep a well-manicured lawn

Well-manicured lawns are less likely to be breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Because water plays such a crucial role in the mosquito breeding process, it's necessary that all potential water sources in a yard be removed. Fallen leaves that are not removed and pockets of soil beneath trees and plants can collect rain water or water from lawn sprinklers, which can be just enough for mosquitoes to breed.

Use fans

Consumer Reports tested the efficacy of oscillating pedestal fans to keep mosquitoes from invading decks and patios and found that such fans cut mosquito landings by 45 to 65 percent for those sitting closest to the fans. When hosting backyard barbecues, homeowners can set up several such fans on their decks and patios to keep mosquitoes at bay.

Mosquitoes are unwelcome guests come spring and summer. But homeowners can take steps to increase the likelihood that their properties stay mosquito-free.



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Well-lit outdoor areas deter intruders and prevent falls, especially during late night usage.

Light Up the Night

Why adding low lights to stairs and along the ground can prevent accidents

By Lisa Iannucci | CTW Features

Good outdoor lighting on your porch and around outdoor steps can deter intruders, prevent falls and accidents and create beautiful aesthetic appeal.

“Lighting steps can be done for effect or for safety, by installing low-voltage LED lights directly into them,” says Joseph A. Rey-Barreau, AIA, IES Architect/Lighting Designer and Associate Professor, School of Interiors College of Design University of Kentucky. “These are tiny fixtures that are installed on the vertical, or the riser, of the step. The beauty of LED lighting is that it has an extraordinarily long life, more than 25,000 hours, so you’re talking about 10 to 15 years of lights.”

Another way to light steps is by using path and spread lights. “They spread light over an area, and you can place one adjacent to each side of the step so that they distribute a light across the bottom. A homeowner can buy a system, install a transformer, run the cable out in the yard, and put a stake in the ground.”

For the porch, most homeowners install ceiling fans that come with a light. “If you’re installing a ceiling fan with a light in a porch, use a damp-rated fan, which means it’s under cover, but won’t come directly in contact with water,” says Rey-Barreau.

Rey-Barreau estimates that good outdoor lighting that lasts will cost between \$500 and \$1,000 for the whole system. Not sure what you want to do yet? Rey-Barreau suggests installing a metal conduit, or pipe, while installing the porch or stairs for future use. “Use that pipe later to run any necessary wires underneath the stairs or sidewalk,” he says.

For help with installation, you can hire a company that specializes in landscape lighting. “Get at least two estimates,” he says. “Keep in mind that anything less than 30 volts does not need a licensed electrician.”

Infrared motion detector lighting, which turns on when it detects motion up to 70 feet away, is another option. You do not even need electricity. Installing solar lighting can provide sufficient light and save energy and money.

If you want to light the way, you’ll first have to choose from many lighting options, such as those made from aluminum, stainless steel and brass and the designs are endless. For more information on lighting options, visit the American Lighting Association website, where you can search for local showrooms. “Most anything that you could want you can find at a specialized lighting store,” Rey-Barreau says.

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LED lights on staircases adds both warmth and safety.



Ground lighting around steps or elevated paths can prevent tripping.



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The Smart Grill (or Smoker!): A Brilliant Way to Cook

The tech-savvy invention lets you use your mobile devices to have your steak and eat it, too

By Nancy Mattia | CTW Features

Remember when grilling a steak meant throwing some charcoal into a no-frills barbecue, splashing lighter fluid on top, and not taking your eyes off the food and the flames for fear of incinerating the T-bone? Then gas grills came along and made the job easier but someone still had to figure out cooking times and keep vigil. Now there are smart grills, freestanding outdoor appliances that rely on the manufacturer's app and Wi-Fi to do much of the work for you, from indicating where exactly to place food on the grill to texting you when it's ready. Think you might like to get smart about grilling too? Here's what you need to know.



The Lynx Smart Grill is Wi-Fi enabled. It asks cooks what's for dinner, and then uses an online database to determine the right cooking time and technique for that food. It even tells users where to place items on the grill for the best results, and sends notifications via audio, visual alerts and an app.

It syncs to your smart device
Using a Wi-Fi connection and Bluetooth, the grill communicates with the app on your iOS or Android device, like a smartphone or tablet.

The grill listens to you
So you like your burger rare (or medium or well done)? Great, just let the grill know on the app and it will follow your instructions. (Some high-end models offer voice-activation to let you communicate.) Once the food is ready, you'll get a text or alert.

It helps you cook food evenly
Though a smart grill can't turn the chicken legs on its own—yet—it lets you know when to do it yourself. Monitoring cooking temperatures is a big part of its job.

The recipes are key
Based on one of the many recipes you choose from the manufacturer's app (see "HYPERLINK "<https://www.charbroil.com/cook/beer-can-chicken-temperature-grill/>"

Beer Can BBQ Chicken" recipe), the grill figures out the optimal cooking time and instructs you where exactly to place each food item on the grill. You can choose from a menu of appetizers, entrees, side dishes, and desserts.

Smart grills can be pricey
Be prepared to shell out big bucks for this technological marvel, from about \$599 for Char-Broil's SmartChef to almost \$10,000 for Lynx's SmartGrill. Like other appliances, the higher the quality of the components, the higher the price; for example, the Lynx model comes with stainless steel grilling grates while the Char-Broil's grates are made of porcelain-coated cast iron.

It won't let you run out of gas
Some models give you a heads up when your propane tank is running low.

You get to stay cool
Sit in the shade and monitor the food's progress remotely. No need to sweat it out by the hot grill!

© CTW Features

Stop making these 8 common grilling mistakes

Cooking food over an open fire imparts all sorts of flavor. Grilling tends to be quicker, less messy and more convenient than cooking in the kitchen - particularly during the dog days of summer.

Outdoor grills are seemingly everywhere, including many backyards across the country. That grills are so commonplace doesn't mean that everyone grilling is employing the right techniques. Becoming the ultimate grillmaster involves understanding the subtleties of grilling and avoiding common mistakes so food can look and taste that much better.

1. Not prepping the food: The French culinary term for preparing to cook is "mise en place." This is especially important when grilling, as cooks must deal with faster cooking times than they would otherwise encounter when cooking meals in the stove.

2. Dirty grill: Make sure the grill is cleaned before and after each use. Grease can quickly build up on a grill, leading to flare-ups that can cause foods to char. Frequent cleaning also helps grillmasters avoid a tiresome cleaning process at the start of the season.

3. Forgetting to preheat: Preheating the grill ensures that foods will cook quickly and as evenly as possible. Otherwise, meats can lose moisture and even stick to cooler grates. Reader's Digest suggests preheating to between 350 F and 450 F depending on the food.

4. Overreliance on lighter fluid: The chemical taste of lighter fluid can transfer to foods even when the fluid is used sparingly. Consider using a chimney starter when grilling with charcoal. And avoid repeated pyrotechnics with fluid, or worse, gasoline.

5. Too much direct heat: Food should not char on the outside before the inside has a chance to cook. A two-zone fire, according to food experts at Serious Eats, enables grillmasters to cook over high heat to sear and then move the food to a lower temperature to continue to cook evenly.

6. Playing with food: Grilling does not require much intervention. Repeatedly flipping and squeezing meat and poultry can cause flavorful juices to leak out. Then you're left with dried-out food. Resist any urges to prod and poke food. And minimize how many times you lift the grill cover to take a peek, as that can cause temperatures to fluctuate. Use a thermometer to determine when food is done. And don't forget that meat will still cook a bit after it's taken off the grill.

7. Improper seasoning: Basting food with sugar-laden sauces and marinades too early can cause flare-ups and burning. Quick rubs can help lock in flavor, and then reserve the sauce for the last few minutes of grilling, says cookbook author Dave Martin.

8. Digging in too soon: Give meats a chance to rest for between five and 10 minutes to allow the juices to redistribute through the food. This improves flavor and tenderness.

Safety Tips for Grilling Season

People have been cooking meals over open flames since the discovery of fire. Even today, when there are so many ways to cook a meal, many still insist there's nothing better than the taste of food cooked on the grill.

The Hearth, Patio & Barbecue Association, which tracks industry trends, points out that one-third of consumers plan to use their grill or smoker more often this year. Even though grilling is widely associated with summer, a growing number of people are embracing year-round grilling. HPBA's CEO Jack Goldman has said, "Barbecuing is no longer just a pastime, but an integral part of the North American lifestyle."

Seven in 10 adults in the United States and eight out of 10 in Canada own a grill or smoker. With so many people firing up their grills, it's important to recognize the importance of grilling safety. Each year an average of 8,900 home fires are caused by grilling, and close to half of all injuries involving grills are due to thermal burns, advises the National Fire Protection Association. Here's how to stay safe.

Only grill outside.

Propane and charcoal barbecue grills should only be used outdoors. Grills should be placed well away from the home. Keep grills away from deck railings, eaves, overhangs, and tree branches.

Keep the grill clean.

Thoroughly clean the grill prior to first use, and keep it tidy all year long. Grease or fat buildup can ignite and cause a fire.

Always attend the grill.

Grill distraction-free and keep an eye on the food being cooked. Simply stepping away for a few moments can lead to a fire or accident.

Start fires safely.

Charcoal grills and gas grills may be lit using electronic starters that do not require fire. If using starter fluid, only do so on charcoal, and do not add more fluid or other flammable liquids after the fire has ignited.

Check for gas leaks.

Whether the gas grill is hooked up to a propane tank or the natural gas supply of a home, ensure that the hoses or tanks are not leaking.



Apply a light soap-and-water solution to hoses to see if they bubble from leaking gas.

Keep baking soda nearby.

Baking soda can control grease fires, but it's also helpful to have a fire extinguisher or a bucket of sand on hand for other types of fires.

Wait for the grill and coals to cool.

Practice safety around the grill until all coals are cool and the grill is no longer hot to the touch. Only then should the grill be moved or relocated.

Grilling is a passion that is enjoyed throughout much of the year. Safely cook outdoors by heeding safety guidelines.



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Sting-Free Fun In the Sun

The types of pest control and prevention everyone needs

By Lisa Iannucci | CTW Features

Beautiful weather means more time spent outdoors, but it also means those little buggers – ants, mosquitos and spiders – might just sneak up on you.

“Nobody likes to get bitten by ants or wasps or anything like that and mosquitoes are potentially transmitting diseases,” says Chelle Hartzler, an etymologist with Orkin, in Atlanta, Georgia. “There are things we can do to discourage them from being closer to our yard.”

If you think that the solution is slathering your lawn with pest control chemicals, think again. Pest companies take a different approach to eliminating pesky bugs from your lawn. It’s called integrated pest management,

or IPM. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) describes IPM as an effective and environmentally sensitive approach to pest management that relies on a combination of common sense practices that are the most economical and least hazardous.

“We first look at why the bugs are there in the first place, because the ant is a symptom of a bigger problem,” says Robbie Rineler with Arrow Exterminators in Atlanta.

While bugs live outside, they will stay on your property if there is, for example, food

for them. “There had to be a food source there that was prevalent enough for the ants to build up enough pressure to stay there, whether its aphids or roots on bushes or garbage,” says Rineler, who inspects the property, identifies the pest problem and provides steps for controlling the situation.

“Sometimes the customer must clean garbage cans, use bags, properly store trash or it could be something as easily as firewood that’s stored against the side of the house,” he says.

See PESTS | 15

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PESTS

From Page 14

When it comes to mosquitoes, they love water. "Eliminate some of those water sources – the water at the bottom of your potted plants, that little dish that holds the extra water, bird baths – and you can significantly reduce the amount of habitat that's there for them and reduce the amount of treatments that we need to do," says Hartzler.

Believe it or not, a pest control company's last resort is the application of a product. "That product is approved for a specific site and insect, and those products vary from state to state," says Rineler. There are a wide range of products to use."

For example, bait is often used to get rid of ants. "Ants are a social insect, so we actually want them to pick up that little piece of food, take it back to their colony, share it with all their nest mates so that it'll encompass the entire nest," says Hartzler.

Rineler prefers applying products that are applied to the root system of the "If I can treat a bush that's has aphids and that's creating honeydew that the ants are feeding on and I can knock out the aphids, the food source becomes less and the colony collapses," says Rineler.

Tree trunk injections, which are considered environmentally friendly and cost effective, can be injected directly into a trees vascular system, which eliminates the need for spraying.

Once the applications are ap-

plied, everyone should stay off the lawn for a few days. "The products are meant to eliminate pests, so they will be toxic to some degree," says Rineler. "However, the EPA conducts multiple scientific tests on all products and the benefits must always outweigh the risks associated with any product or they would never be registered. That being says, the pest control industry is highly regulated and all products should be used in accordance with the label directions to reduce the chances of contact."

Pest control companies can also be Green Pro Certified. "To receive this accreditation the company must meet program standards and utilize integrated pest management strategies, such as minimizing the amount of product used by targeting areas that are conducive to pests and only treating as needed," says Rineler.

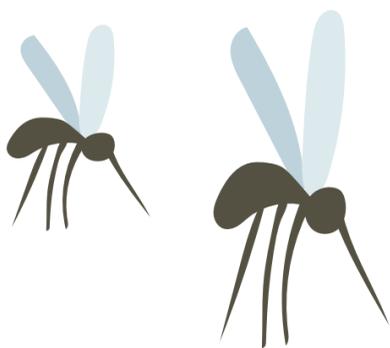
If you would prefer natural products, Rineler says there are products available that contain natural ingredients such as Rosemary Oil and Peppermint Oil.

"Also, gardeners sometimes use ladybugs as a natural predator since ladybugs will eat the aphids that destroy plants," he says.

Look for non-chemical treatments of bugs, such as boric acid for ants. According to the EPA, boric acid acts as a stomach poisons in ants. Since it occurs naturally in water, fruits, vegetables and forage crops, and is an essential nutrient for plants as well as an essential element for many organisms, it is not considered toxic.

Getting stung isn't on anyone's summer list of things to do, so get rid of the bugs by getting rid of the garbage and water. Then, if you still need some help, contact a pest control professional who can help you to get rid of what's really biting you.

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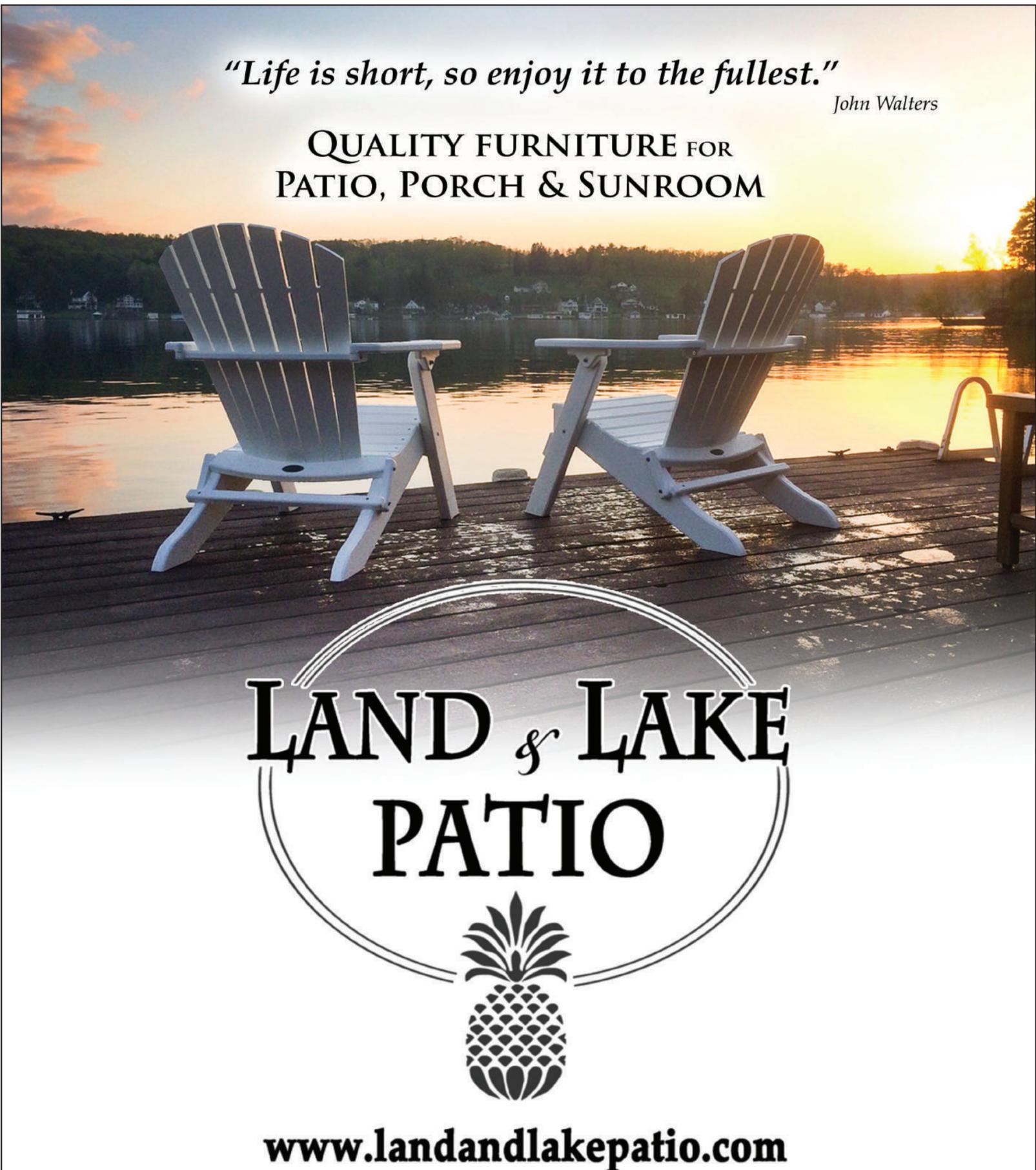
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