

Planning Space For Outdoor Living

A well-designed outdoor living room can be a valuable addition to any home. With careful design consideration, the living space can be extended to allow indoor activities to take place outdoors during the spring, summer and fall. During winter, an outdoor space can serve as an attractive view and offer promises of fun and casual living for the warmer months ahead.

Before electric fans and air conditioning, families spent many hours socializing on porches and in yards during the warm-weather months. Now people are again discovering the joys of outdoor living. Exterior living spaces, such as patios, porches and decks, are natural extensions to indoor social areas. Gazebos are an increasingly popular addition for outdoor social activities. For most efficient use, these areas should be located next to and with easy access to living rooms, family rooms and/or dining rooms. Meditation gardens, flower or butterfly gardens, bird baths and birdhouses can be located away from the busier outdoor social areas to provide private views from the inside sleeping and retreat areas.

Screened porches extend your living space and provide a buffer and shade to adjoining walls and windows. Trees and outdoor ceiling fans furnish added warm-weather comfort. Sunrooms and enclosed all-weather porches are other options to make areas into all-season rooms.

Consider your many alternatives when planning outdoor living. Take full advantage of the site while accommodating family needs. First, evaluate the types of activities

you desire, such as outdoor dining, cooking, entertaining, sunning, hobbies and children's games. What is necessary for each specific activity? Consider the space needed, sun and shade requirements, location in relation to other indoor and outdoor areas, and the time of day and year the activity is most likely to occur. Notice, too, whether there are views you want to hide or screen from view.



The size of deck and patio spaces is often too small for the expected activities. For example, a minimum of 12 x 12 feet is needed for eight people to dine in an outdoor patio. A patio area 20 to 25 feet across provides even more space for circulation and various activities.

Environmental conditions play an important part in determining the location and design treatment. Note how much shade or sun an outdoor area receives over a period of time and the location of this pattern at varying times of the year and day. Then compare this to the intended activities to determine the amount of sun and shade you need. For example, in Kentucky dining outside can be very comfortable as early as April and as late as October. However, you will need shade during the hot summer months. Either a natural or architectural overhead element

can satisfy the varying shading requirements.

Summer breezes also play an important role. The proper location of shade combined with cooling summer breezes makes the difference in whether you enjoy an open-air living area during the hot summer months or retreat into an indoor air-conditioned environment.

The location of indoor rooms plays a major role in locating an outside living area. This outdoor room should have easy access to an indoor living area and should ideally be considered a physical extension of the indoor room. If there is no direct access from an indoor living room, consider converting a window into a door. The addition of sliding glass or French doors provides both visual and physical access to the outdoors.

Options Available. . .

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Screened porches effectively extend your living space and provide a buffer and shade to adjoining walls and windows. Trees, as well as outdoor ceiling fans, can provide added comfort during warm weather. Sunrooms and enclosed all-weather porches are other options that make areas into all-season rooms.

Options for outdoor spaces include decks, patios and gazebos. **Decks** are one of the most popular outdoor living areas since they

can be built level with the floor of the adjoining indoor space. When located directly off a kitchen or dining room, a deck provides an area for outdoor entertaining and a place for the barbecue. Decks can be any size, are easy to get to and, since they are above ground level, water naturally drains from them.

If you have the yard space and see an open air living space as a retreat from household activities, consider a **gazebo**. Gazebos originated in Victorian England as freestanding buildings in a formal garden. They offered a place to rest and view the surrounding scenery. Although many people still think of gazebos as elegant little eight-sided structures with ornate latticework, the term today is used to describe any freestanding backyard structure that provides a sheltered place outdoors. It actually performs the same function as the screened porch of forty-fifty years ago.

The simplest and least expensive option is a **patio** that is built on-grade. Floors can be brick, stone or poured concrete and landscaping features can include planting beds and retaining walls. Shapes and sizes are limited only by your imagination and space available. A patio can be designed into the overall landscaping and gardening plan to enhance the backyard beauty.

Planning the Space . . .

Outdoor rooms have the same basic elements as indoor spaces: walls, ceilings and floors. Although few people would consider an indoor living room successful if it contained only a floor and an occasional chair, design development in an outdoor space is often that limited. Walls and ceilings serve to create privacy, define space, control sun, shade and wind, frame views and give human scale to outdoor spaces. Walls and ceiling can be composed

of plant materials, wood or masonry. Pergolas, trellises, fences and walls are all architectural elements that can define walls and ceilings. A combination of both plant and natural materials can define the outdoor



space as well as provide a link and transition between the outdoor and indoor living areas.

Live with a space for a

while before deciding what you will do. Although the obvious purpose of gardens and landscaping is aesthetic, a yard also serves as an outdoor living room. It must function for you.

Storage...

Storage is important for both entertaining supplies and the tools and implements for yard maintenance. While most people never buy everything that's on the market, what they do buy usually takes up more storage space than is available. Practical storage areas make an excellent outdoor remodeling project.

The most common place to keep yard tools is a freestanding shed. Many are prefabricated for easy assembly and can be placed directly on the ground or on a cement slab or pad of dry-laid bricks. They are not terribly attractive, however, and will need occasional maintenance.

More attractive and functional storage can be integrated into a deck or patio area. A raised deck provides some shelter from the weather and is a good location for keeping tools under cover. Hanging rakes, hoes and other long-handled tools from either the back wall or brackets mounted on the support posts is a good way to keep them neat and ready to use. On the deck itself, consider an enclosed bench with a lid or shelving. Enclosed storage areas can be built into privacy walls and around the cooking areas.

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