

### Tips for Creating Your Own Outdoor Room

No matter what the weather or the season, you can enjoy cooking, entertaining or just relaxing on a deck or patio that is every bit as comfortable as the inside of your home. It's easy when you create an outdoor room. An outdoor room is really nothing more than an outdoor space for cooking, eating and entertaining. If you have a backyard, a deck or a patio, you already have the beginnings of one. Add a few amenities, like a natural gas-powered grill and patio heater, and you can transform your outdoor space into a year-round oasis for relaxing and entertaining.

#### The basic requirements

You don't have to have a massive back yard to create an outdoor room – just a little imagination. Ideally you'll want yours to encompass a grilling and eating area, pulled together with a hearth product, such as a fireplace or fire pit, some comfortable seating and lighting.

From there the options are as wide as the great outdoors. Some outdoor rooms feature complete kitchens, with expansive counter space and full food preparation areas that include sinks and plumbing. Others go further by adding a dishwasher, refrigerator and pizza oven. It's even possible to create an outdoor recreation room since speakers and game tables are now made for outdoor use.

Add a cocktail bar, fountain, patio heater, landscaping, and sculptures to make your outdoor room even more livable and appealing. It's all a matter of taste, how you'll use the space and your budget.

#### Define your space

Do you already have a deck or patio you'd like to use as your starting point? If not, you'll want to determine how much space you want to devote to your outdoor room. Remember that you don't have to build it all at one time. Some of the most interesting outdoor spaces are created over a number of years.

#### Determine your foundation

You'll want to think about what you'll use as the foundation for your room. If you're going the deck route, determine if you're using pretreated wood, composite decking or some other material and if it will be a single level or multi-level. Perhaps you'd prefer a stone or brick patio or to combine a patio with a deck. Retaining walls, fences, screens, and landscaping can all be used to create the edges or walls of your outdoor room. Retractable awnings, trellis-like overhead structures and other options can further enclose your space to whatever extent you desire.

#### Consider how you'll use your outdoor room

Will you use it year-round? Do you plan to entertain a lot? Do you have children? Do you want to create a more secluded, romantic environment? Do you want a space where you can just unwind and relax after a hard day? Do you want privacy or need to block any views?

Use a notepad to jot down ideas about how the space will be used in all of its applications, from entertaining to relaxing.

## Comforts of Home<sup>SM</sup>: Design Tips

### **Do your research**

Whether you're planning a remodeling project that will yield the outdoor room of your dreams, or are working with a builder to create a brand new home which will include an outdoor room, you'll want to do some research. You'll find an abundance of information on outdoor rooms online, in home improvement and general interest publications, as well as at your local home improvement center or outdoor appliance dealer. If you're building a new home, make sure you share your thoughts early on with your builder.

Pay attention to the different features and how different materials and plants compliment one another. Look for patios that have different shapes or secondary smaller patio extensions that could be built in phases. Clip or print pictures and put them into a notebook that you can share with your contractor, builder or designer. Visit area home improvement stores, landscape companies and specialty retailers that sell hearth, barbecue and patio products. You'll be amazed at the many new products out on the market – from high tech devices that zap mosquitoes to complete kitchens that even include a sink.

When it's hot, cool down your outdoor room with a water-misting system. They can dramatically drop the temperature as misters broadcast an ultra-fine screen of heat absorbing water. There are also fans created specifically for outdoor use. You'll find everything you need to create an outdoor bathroom with a shower or even an outdoor bedroom.

### **Do-it-yourself or hire help?**

Anyone can build an outdoor room or at least portions of it with a little skill and time. Depending on the size and complexity of your project, however, you may want to hire a professional. It can alleviate potential problems that may arise, such as obtaining construction permits or meeting local building codes.

Some home improvement centers offer design assistance, as well as building and installation services. Architects, professional landscapers and contractors can help with overall design ideas, developing the plans and ensuring that any construction required meets code requirements.

It's also a good idea to consult with specialty retailers who can tell you about what's available in terms of appliances and outdoor furniture, as well as what works best in a certain climate.

## Comforts of Home<sup>SM</sup>: Design Tips

### Plan it

The key to creating an outdoor room that will add value to your home begins with planning. Sketch out an overall plan for what you want and need and begin to build it in stages as your budget allows.

- Break down your thoughts by “zones.” For example, your primary zone should be next to your home and include appliances that may need to be accessible from your home. As you fan out into your yard, you can downscale as needed.
- Fire, food, seating and lighting are the key elements in every well-designed outdoor living room. Position the fireplace as the focal point, blend in the cooking and seating areas and think about where you’ll want lighting. Then you can decide what other features you want to complete your outdoor room.
- Pay attention to the seating and traffic patterns.
- Keep in mind proportion and scale. If you have a small yard, focus on the things you absolutely must have to enable you to enjoy the space. Maybe there’s no room for a spa but plenty of room for a built-in grill and comfortable seating.
- If you’ve got the space, consider multiple conversation areas for enhanced functionality, interest and entertaining options.
- It’s important to understand your home’s architectural style when creating an outdoor living room so that the outdoor spaces accentuate your home’s indoor spaces. There are products available for every taste and style.

### Must-haves and add-them-laters

Don’t worry if time and budget prevent you from creating the outdoor room of your dreams overnight. Determine what you absolutely have to have initially and go from there. For example, during the first year you may want to install a hearth product and define the grilling and seating areas, then accessorize the next year. Or maybe you just can’t live without that complete outdoor kitchen so the pool and spa will have to wait a couple of years.

### Climate compatible

Consider the types of appliances, flooring, cabinetry, and other items compared to your environment. Just like the inside of your living room you’ll have comfortable chairs and couches for socializing or lounging but they’ll be covered with weatherproof fabrics. Pressure-treated wood is especially critical in the warm and moist climates, where very favorable conditions for wood deterioration take place.

## Comforts of Home<sup>SM</sup>: Design Tips

### **Go gas**

Natural gas amenities can transform any outdoor space into an outdoor oasis. If your home already uses natural gas for heating, the same pipes that supply gas to your furnace can be used to supply energy for gas logs, outdoor lights and other natural gas products. If you don't already have natural gas, it's easy to get it. Just call PSNC Energy at (866) 546-5369 for details.

Gas fireplaces and fire pits are engineered to provide fuel-efficient, fuss-free flames at the flick of a switch. You can enjoy a cozy fire instantly, when you want it. There's no wood to buy, haul or store, which means less mess and less hassle.

Natural gas grills are convenient because they don't have tanks that take up space or run out of fuel mid-meal. When you cook with a natural gas grill, your food can have the rich, smoked flavor without the mess and long warm-up time of charcoal grills.

Natural gas patio heaters extend the enjoyment of outdoor living and dining on patios, decks and poolside, while spa and pool heaters let you enjoy these amenities year round.

### **Let there be light**

To extend the amount of time spent outdoors, consider lighting for pathways, around pools or to accentuate landscaping. Time and money spent on appliances and other fun items won't amount to much if you can't see anything once the sun goes down. Gas-powered lights are particularly great investments because they stay on even when the power goes out.

### **Create character with the details**

Outdoor furnishings add beauty and character, creating the atmosphere of a lush oasis. In addition to tables and chairs for the eating area, consider chaise lounges, couches, side tables and possibly a hammock. Decorative details such as a work of art, a sculpture or fun accents like party lights will provide a personal touch.

### **Make landscaping integral to your design**

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. It's a good idea to consult with outdoor plant experts and choose vegetation that will create privacy and beauty at the same time. Keep in mind the size of the vegetation as it reaches maturity. The plants must be placed in strategic locations that will not interfere with the function of the room.

Don't underestimate the power of bubbling or trickling water. Fountains, small pools, waterfalls and other water features not only add visual appeal to an outdoor room but they also produce pleasing background sounds that add to its overall ambiance. Water features also attract butterflies and birds. These living creatures will add even more beauty to your outdoor space.

### **Let your outdoor room grow**

Don't worry if time and budget prevent you from creating the outdoor room of your dreams overnight. Add to it every year – an especially good idea since you'll develop new ideas about how you want to use the space, new products will become available and your tastes may change.

Natural Gas. Experience the Difference.