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YOUR PERFECT OUTDOOR SPACE

From fun little spaces to vast entertaining areas, put your stamp on your backyard outdoor entertaining area with these tips and ideas.

There's nothing better than heading outside on a warm summer's evening. As more and more Australian's flock outside to play, cook and entertain, it's little wonder that the outdoor space has matured. It's no longer just a rectangle of lawn with a Hills hoist in the middle.

Today's backyard is a beautiful oasis of comfort and style. Homeowners can choose from a vast array of materials, designs, colours and accessories to put an individual stamp on a space. And you can, too. If you're planning to rejuvenate your backyard - or simply want to give your existing space a facelift - read on for design and styling tips.

A SPACE FOR YOU

Before you dive into the design of your outdoor space, think carefully about how you plan to use it. Will you be out there every evening over summer, enjoying al fresco meals with your family in between games of backyard cricket? Is it a space that you'll only use when entertaining friends? Or perhaps you want to reinvigorate a tired corner of your

garden so you've got something nice to look at from indoors? Then, do a simple sketch of the layout so you know how much room you've got to work with. Consider plants or trees that may not yet have reached their full size, and take their future growth into account.

PREPARING MEALS

If you're likely to be out enjoying your new backyard entertaining area most evenings throughout summer, then cooking and storage should be your top priorities. When it comes to cooking, are you a simple steak-and-salad type or do you fancy yourself a connoisseur in the kitchen? If cooking and entertaining is your thing, then you can create a space to rival your indoor kitchen. From entire outdoor kitchens replete with extensive storage, to spit roasters and outdoor pizza ovens, the choices are endless. Otherwise, you may prefer to keep it simple on the cooking front, and simply place a small compact BBQ in the corner.

THE OUTDOOR SETTING

These days, the choices are endless when it comes to outdoor furniture. There are couches and armchairs, hammocks and swings, tables for two, and large dining settings - all in a range of weather-resistant materials and colours to suit all tastes. Extendable dining tables are perfect for small family meals and entertaining for extended family and friends. You may want to compliment an outdoor lounge with a timber dining table and chairs for that cool backyard look. A statement piece - such as an oversized wicker chair or a colourful hammock - can lift your outdoor area to new heights; not to mention provide the perfect place to lounge with the papers and a cuppa!

FINISHING TOUCHES

Have some fun adding finishing touches to your outdoor area. This season, you'll find a wide selection of bright summer colours and prints on cushions, tableware and pots - so you can either compliment your indoor colour scheme or go for a completely fresh look outside. Consider how you'll light the space. Go for candles in glass jars for a tropical feel, or perhaps place solar lights around the garden to create a sense of magic. A spotlight shining upwards on a feature tree in your garden looks fabulous, too. Think about shade. If you're likely to use the space on weekends or during the day, then it's important to have an umbrella, shade sail, gazebo or some other means to keep things cool. There are even misting kits available now to really bring the outdoor temperature down. Within the garden, a carefully placed statue or a collection of hanging baskets will create points of interest; as will a succulent garden or a collection of carefully tended orchids in pots. Herbs are a great addition to any outdoor space - they are easy to grow, a beautiful addition to meals, and they look



THE GREAT OUTDOOR ENTERTAINER

There's something quintessentially Australian about entertaining outdoors - whether you're simply hanging around the barbecue or enjoying an evening cocktail party on the deck. Whichever way you like to entertain, you need the right space to do it in. Unleash your inner entertainer with these great tips for setting up the perfect backyard party zone.

These days, getting your backyard in tip-top shape for entertaining means so much more than mowing the lawn. Setting up an outdoor entertaining space requires as much thought as furnishing your living room or choosing the appliances for your kitchen. You need to think about everything from what you'll be sitting on to how you'll cook. Then there's the lighting, heating and cooling. An outdoor entertaining area is a complete package - and the good news is that there's plenty of choice out there. Before you think about all of that, though, take a look at your backyard and think about how much space you'll need. There's no point in giving your whole backyard over to an incredible entertainment zone if you're only likely to throw one big birthday bash out there each year. Conversely, if you see yourself having friends and family over for barbecues and get-togethers every other weekend, then you've got every reason to invest in more outdoor furniture. Here are some of the main things to consider when you're getting your outdoor area ready for entertaining.

COLOURS AND STYLES

An outdoor area is an extension of your home - and should feel that way. If you have modern furniture and fittings inside, continue that theme outside. Or, if your home is more traditional, perhaps choose wicker and timber pieces to fill out your entertaining area. There are a huge range of colours and styles to choose from. Bright colours work well on patios, while more muted, earthy tones look fabulous on a timber deck. But don't be constrained by the rules - select a colour palette that appeals to you, and run with that.

KEEPING COOL

Keep your cool as a great entertainer - and keep your guests comfortable, too - by making sure that your outdoor entertaining area doesn't get too hot in summer. You have plenty of options available to you, including: umbrellas, shade sails, gazebos, and misting fans and kits. Don't forget that trees and plants can cool you down, too! Get some shade trees in early, be patient, and your comfort will be rewarded for it.

STAYING WARM

Summer nights can get chilly, particularly in southern areas. Plus, if you're a year-round entertainer, there may be colder winter nights when you'll want to be out under the stars. So think about ways to keep your outdoor entertaining area warm, too. For warmth, there are loads of choices, including: fire pits, heat

strips, outdoor gas heaters, bio ethanol fireplaces and chimeneas.

KEEP IT LOOKING GOOD

Once you've set up your outdoor entertaining area, make sure you keep it looking good. After all, you have probably made a significant investment - and you want to make sure it lasts. Even though outdoor furniture is built to withstand UV light and rain, it is still susceptible to damage. You can care for it by applying sealants, coatings or varnishes each year; or investing in covers to prolong their life. Once you've got your outdoor space set up, then all that's left is to get out there and enjoy it with your friends and family.

Happy entertaining!

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When selecting outdoor furniture you need to consider:

- 1 Number of people in the household.
- 2 Size of the outdoor space.
- 3 How the area will be used, eg. dining, lounge, entertaining
- 4 Type of material (this will influence the maintenance required).
- 5 The style of your home and the personality of the people in it.

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