

A photograph of an outdoor living space. In the foreground, a dark grey wicker lounge chair is positioned on a stone patio. The patio is surrounded by lush green plants and flowers. In the background, two wooden chairs with black metal frames are visible on a raised stone platform. The overall scene is bright and inviting, suggesting a relaxing outdoor environment.

Outdoor Living



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Steak Grilling Tips

A steak grilled to perfection is a remarkable culinary experience.

A lot goes into cooking a steak. From choosing the right cut of meat to seasoning the meat well to perfecting your grilling technique and temperature, you could spend an entire summer getting it just right.

Luckily, professional chefs have done a lot of the work for you and have some tips to offer.

Cook's Illustrated. The pros at Cook's

Illustrated put together an entire guide to help you perfect grilled steak. They swear by double-thick cowboy ribeyes for grilling, and encourage you to add a sprinkle of salt to the steaks after they're cooked. The salt, they say, will dissolve into the meat's juices and provide a satisfying crunch. We all know it's important to get a good read of the steak's temperature so that it cooks to the exact level of doneness you want. Here's a handy guide from Cook's Illustrated. Rare: 115-120 degrees Fahrenheit; medium-rare: 120-125 degrees Fahrenheit; medium: 130-135 degrees Fahrenheit; medium-well: 140-145

degrees Fahrenheit; well: 150-155 degrees Fahrenheit. Check each steak as the thickness of each one will vary and they may reach doneness at different times.

Bon Appetit. The experts at Bon Appetit offer a set of rules that they promise will make you a great griller of steak. They include letting the meat rise to room temperature before cooking, choosing cuts of meat that are 1 1/2 to 2 inches thick to provide char on the outside and tender scrumptiousness on the inside, adding your own fresh cracked pepper and letting the meat rest for 10 minutes before cutting. They

prep steak for cooking by salting it with kosher salt three times beginning a few hours before it hits the grill, again after being dried with paper towels just before grilling, and again before serving.

Weber. The pros at the Weber grill company also recommend salting often and letting the meat reach room temperature before cooking. They encourage grillers not to be afraid to get a nice, dark brown crust on the meat, and to remove the meat from the grill just as it reaches temperature (including allowing for the 5 extra degrees the steak will cook after you take it off the grill).

Invest in Relaxation

You can kick back and soak up the sun — or even catch some Zzzzzs — in your own backyard with just a small investment.

For many people, the backyard is a place to relax after a long day. Here's a look at some equipment that can help you relax on your back porch, patio or deck.

Hammock. If you've never spent an afternoon relaxing in a hammock, you're missing out. If you're lucky enough to have two shade trees from which to hang a hammock, all you need is a basic model. If not, you'll need a metal frame to hang the hammock from. You could also consider a portable hammock, which folds up similar to folding camping chairs. The advantage of this type of model is you can take it with you on the go, such as to the beach or on a camping trip.

Zero-gravity chairs. Zero-gravity chairs hit the market in the 2000s. The metal frame with, covered with a fabric seating surface, allows you to lay back with your weight evenly distributed across the chair, and is based on a design used by NASA astronauts during liftoff. Over the past few years, oversized zero-gravity chairs have come on the market, and you can even buy a swing made with two zero-gravity chairs, so you can



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swing in the zero-gravity position. Ultimate relaxation.

Outdoor bed. If you're looking to do some serious napping, consider putting in an outdoor bed. This can be as simple as putting padding and

bolster pillows on an existing porch swing. There are outdoor bed units with a wicker or wood base available. Or you can get whimsical and install a platform bed swinging from a large pergola. Reach out to a

local contractor and see how they can accommodate your most elaborate plans. The thing to remember is you'll need a mattress and bedding suited for outdoor use.

Bohemian swing chair. If

you're going for boho style, consider a fabric swing made from cotton, canvas or macramé. Some options come with padding, or you can toss in your own outdoor pillows for a cozy, relaxing vibe.

Cold Smoking Basics

Smoking is a cooking method in which foods are brought to temperature at low heat while being infused with smoke flavor. Another kind of smoking, however, is gaining popularity.

Cold smoking is the art of infusing food with smoke flavor without cooking it, and can also be used to preserve foods. The temperature should not go above 100 degrees, according to BarbecueBible.com, and while it typically takes 12-24 hours, some foods are cold smoked for up to six weeks.

A WORD OF CAUTION

The University of Georgia's National Center for Home Food Preservation recommends smoking only foods that have been previously fermented, salted or cured, since cold smoking keeps foods in the 40-140 degrees Fahrenheit temperature "danger zone" where microbial growth occurs. The Center also recommends that cold smoked foods be cooked to 160 degrees Fahrenheit before consumption, and cautions that even then, some people at high risk for foodborne illness should not consume cold-smoked foods at all.

EatCuredMeat.com recommends smoking at a temperature of no higher than 86 degrees Fahrenheit, and says that European officials recommend an even lower temperature at 72 degrees Fahrenheit, to avoid the food beginning to cook.

EQUIPMENT

Some high-end commercial-

ly available smokers have a separate chamber, away from the heat source, for cold smoking. Otherwise, you will need a separate smoke generator. Units intended for cold smoking typically burn sawdust, wood chips or wood pellets. Some units attach to an existing smoker or grill.

WHAT TO SMOKE

Some foods you can cold smoke include meat, cheese, fish, nuts, fruits and vegetables. EatCuredMeat.com recommends a fresh, good-quality meat for smoking, and preparing it with a salt cure or brine.

Bradley Smoker's website calls cheese the "easiest food to cold smoke" and recommends using apple, cheery, pecan or maple wood.

COLD SMOKED CHEDDAR CHEESE

The following recipe from Leite's Culinaria is a great beginner recipe because it does not require a dedicated cold smoking unit.

Ingredients

Two 8-ounce blocks of cheddar cheese

Directions

Set the smoker to maintain a temperature of less than 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

Place the cheese on the grate of



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the smoker. Set three lit charcoal briquettes flat in the charcoal pan or firebox of your smoker. Place a flat wood chunk on top of the charcoal to create smoke. Provide a little airflow and replace the charcoal and wood

chunks as needed to keep the smoke flowing.

Apply light smoke for about 4 hours.

Remove the cheese from the grate and place it in a resealable plastic



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bag. Store in the refrigerator for 2 weeks before eating to allow the smoke flavor to permeate the cheese and mature slightly.

Cool Summer Cocktails

Cool off on a hot summer day with a fruity, smooth, ice-cold cocktail.

You'll almost always want to start with fruit for a great boozy summer concoction. From classic to trendy, there's a summer drink flavor for everyone.

PIMM'S CUP

A Pimm's Cup is not only a cool, fruity easy-to-drink concoction but its namesake liquor was invented to help with digestion. This popular New Orleans sip is mixed in the glass, so it's a simple drink for a lazy summer day. Here's a recipe from Liquor.com.

Ingredients

2 ounces Pimm's No. 1
 1/2 ounce lemon juice, freshly squeezed
 Ginger ale, to top
 For garnish: cucumber slice, mint sprig, strawberry, lemon wheel (optional), orange wheel (optional)

Directions

Add Pimm's No. 1 and lemon juice into a highball glass over ice, then top with ginger ale and stir briefly to combine.

Garnish with a cucumber slice, mint sprig, skewered strawberry and optional lemon and orange wheels.

RUM SUNSET

Rum and fruit spell summer. Delish.com's Rum Sunset recipe is what happens when



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a Tequila Sunrise meets a daiquiri. It's simple, fruity and boozy. What's not to like?

Ingredients

12 ounces orange juice
 3 ounces light rum
 2 tablespoons grenadine
 lime slices, for garnish
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Directions

Combine orange juice and rum. Set aside 1/3 of the mixture. Pour 2/3 of the orange juice mixture into 2 ice-filled glasses. Set aside. Mix reserved orange juice and rum with 2 tbsp. grenadine. Slowly pour into each glass so it settles on the bottom, creating an ombre effect.

Garnish with lime slices.

CHAMPAGNE PUNCH

If it's bubbles you want on a hot summer day, look no further than Champagne Punch. Here's Pizzazzerie's recipe for a fancy hot-weather drink that will hit the spot.

Ingredients

1 750 milliliter bottle of champagne or sparkling wine, chilled

4 ounces ruby red grapefruit juice
 4 ounces orange juice
 4 ounces simple syrup
 1 ounce grenadine

Directions

Pour chilled champagne into a punch bowl. Slowly pour in the grapefruit juice, orange juice, simple syrup and grenadine. Garnish with citrus slices or fresh flowers and serve.

Socially Distanced Get Togethers

We know that social interaction is crucial to keeping our mental health in tact during the pandemic. Find ways to safely socializing with friends and family this summer.

The single most important factor when you are attending or hosting a social event is to follow local guidelines on COVID prevention.

Aside from wearing masks, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers the following tips for keeping your gatherings safe.

- Host your gathering outdoors, when possible, or a well-ventilated indoor space.
- Arrange tables and chairs to allow for social distancing. People from the same household can be in groups together but should be 6 feet away from other groups.
- Avoid shaking hands and hugging. Instead, do elbow bumps or wave to say hi.
- Wear masks when less than 6 feet apart from people or indoors.
- Provide hand sanitizer and clearly marked hand washing areas, and encourage hand washing before serving or eating food.
- Limit the number of people handling food and restrict access to food preparation areas.



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- Encourage guests to bring their own food and drinks.
- Use single-use options or identify one person to serve sharable items, like salad dressings, food containers and condiments.
- Limit contact with commonly touched surfaces or shared items
- Use touchless garbage

cans or pails.

- Use gloves when removing garbage bags or handling and disposing of trash. Wash hands after removing gloves.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces and any shared items between use when feasible.
- If you choose to use any shared items that are reusable,

such as seating covers, tablecloths or linen napkins, wash, clean and sanitize them after the event.

- Consider activities that are naturally socially distanced, such as sidewalk chalk art or frisbee.

Here are some ideas for social-distancing-friendly outdoor activities.

- An outdoor movie night where families are seated at least 6 feet apart from each other.
- A picnic where everyone brings their own food from home or takeout.
- Attend an outdoor farmers market following the guidelines above.
- Attend a drive-in movie.



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Outdoor Entertaining Accessories

Entertaining friends and family at home is easier with the help of a few accessories.

From food to music to setting the scene, here are a few accessories that will elevate your outdoor living spaces and events.

DINING

Bring a decorative theme into your outdoor space with an outdoor rug under the dining table, or in the seating area. Add coordinating melamine dishes and acrylic drinkware.

A lazy susan on the center of the outdoor dining table makes it easier to pass dishes or condiments.

You might also consider outdoor place mats to protect the table and enhance the design of your outdoor eating space.

MUSIC

High-quality waterproof bluetooth speakers will allow you to connect a phone or indoor sound receiver to crank up your tunes in the backyard.

You can even coordinate your landscape lighting to change colors and dance with your music with a smart lighting setup.

LIGHT A FIRE

Gathering around a fire with friends and family on a cool fall evening can make for a memorable night. There are many models to choose from, and it will all depend on what your preferences are.

A wood-burning fire pit is a traditional option that can provide plenty of heat, but blowing smoke is often an issue.

A gas fire pit or fire table eliminates the smoke issue but won't radiate heat out as far as burning wood logs. Gas flames also tend to be at the whims of the wind and can be blown out altogether by a strong gust.

A newer option that has come on the market in the past several years is a "smokeless" wood-burning fire pit. While no wood-burning fire will ever be truly smokeless, these models are designed to use heated air to reduce the amount of smoke coming off the burning logs.

PATIO BAR

If you enjoy a good drink, consider investing in an outdoor bar where you can mix up your concoctions. While tiki bars aren't in fashion at the moment, wood and resin models are readily available, and you can even buy one with a built-in ice chest.

Set Up an Outdoor Movie Theater

With the need to social distance and stay safe during the pandemic, there's never been a better time to install an outdoor movie theater to keep your family entertained.

You don't have to break the bank to set up a movie-watching experience your family can enjoy. You'll need a few components to get started, and then you can expand from there into the nice-to-haves.

GETTING STARTED

If you're hosting a one-off event where you want to show a movie, check with local rental companies for inflatable screen/projector combos that you can rent by the day.

The basics you'll need to make your own outdoor theater are a surface on which to project the video and a projector. Basic projector models typically include basic speakers, but you'll likely want to upgrade to enhance your theater setup.

You could attach a large white sheet to the side of your house for the projection surface. There are commercially available screens that are fairly inexpensive, and you can build your own frame for the screen from PVC pipe or buy a pre-made frame.

You'll want to spend a little



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more on the projector. Not all projectors are created equal, so be sure to read online reviews and perhaps even try out a model or two before settling on your final purchase.

You will likely need to experiment with the "throw," or the length of space between

the projector and the screen, to get the best image.

UPGRADES

The sky's the limit if you're ready to invest in audio-visual equipment for a truly theatrical experience.

The sound is definitely one

area where you can upgrade. Weatherproof bluetooth speakers can be pricey but will be able to withstand the elements and provide great sound. You could even go with surround sound to duplicate the movie theater experience.

If you'll be showing movies

in the backyard often, consider buying a popcorn machine to keep your customers fed and happy. After all, it's not really a movie without a tub of buttery, salty popcorn.

Of course, you can always upgrade the projector to show high-definition or 3-D video.