

Summer Home & Garden



Kid-Friendly Backyard Features

Backyards can become some of the most memorable places in a child's summer.

With a few thoughtful features, families can transform outdoor spaces into safe environments where children can play, explore and even learn new skills. Whether a yard is large or small, creating areas designed with kids in mind can help encourage outdoor activity and family time.

Many family-friendly backyard updates focus on combining safety, creativity and opportunities for active play.

CREATING SAFE PLAY AREAS

Safety is the first priority when designing outdoor play spaces. Soft surfaces such as grass, rubber mulch or playground mats can help cushion falls in areas where children run, climb or jump. For families installing swings, slides or climbing structures, placing equipment on level ground and allowing plenty of open space around it can reduce the risk of injuries.

Fences or clearly defined boundaries can keep younger children safely within the yard. Parents may want to check that gates close securely and that play equipment is appropriate for the age of the children using it. Shade is another important element



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during warm summer days. Trees, umbrellas or small shade structures can protect children from prolonged sun exposure while they play.

INTRODUCING GARDENING ACTIVITIES

Backyards offer opportunities for hands-on learning. Simple gardening projects allow children to see how plants grow while developing patience and responsibility. Small raised garden beds or

container gardens are often easier for kids to manage. Fast-growing plants such as cherry tomatoes, lettuce, radishes or herbs can spark enthusiasm because children see results quickly.

Some families create themed garden areas just for children, such as a "pizza garden" with tomatoes, basil and peppers or a butterfly garden filled with pollinator-friendly flowers. These spaces can spark curiosity about nature

while giving kids a sense of ownership over part of the yard.

ENCOURAGING OUTDOOR GAMES

Open lawn areas are ideal for classic backyard games. Activities such as tag, soccer or catch provide opportunities for physical activity and social interaction. Portable games like cornhole, giant yard dice, bocce ball or ring toss can also be set up quickly for fam-

ily gatherings.

Creative play spaces add variety. Chalk drawing areas on patios, small obstacle courses or simple balance beams built from landscape timbers can inspire imaginative play.

Water-based activities are especially popular during hot weather. Sprinklers, splash pads or small inflatable pools can provide cooling fun while encouraging active movement.

Choosing Outdoor Fabrics

Outdoor living spaces have become an extension of the home, with comfortable seating areas, rugs and shade structures creating inviting places to relax and entertain.

To keep these spaces looking their best throughout the summer, choose fabrics designed to withstand the elements.

Unlike indoor textiles, outdoor fabrics must stand up to sunlight, moisture and temperature changes. Selecting materials that are durable, fade-resistant and easy to clean can help cushions, rugs and other outdoor features maintain their appearance for multiple seasons.

LOOK FOR WEATHER-RESISTANT MATERIALS

Many modern outdoor fabrics are specifically engineered to resist fading, mildew and moisture. Solution-dyed acrylic fabrics are among the most popular options for patio cushions and umbrellas. Because the color is added to the fibers before they are woven, these fabrics tend to hold their color even after long exposure to sunlight.

Polyester fabrics treated for outdoor use are another common choice. They are often more budget-friendly while still offering resistance to water and



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stains. Olefin, also known as polypropylene, is frequently used in outdoor rugs because it dries quickly and resists mold and mildew.

Labels that mention UV resistance, water resistance or mildew resistance can help homeowners identify products designed for exterior conditions.

CONSIDER COMFORT AND MAINTENANCE

Durability is important, but

comfort also matters when choosing fabrics. Breathable materials that allow air to circulate tend to feel cooler during hot weather. Textured weaves and softer finishes can make cushions and pillows feel more like indoor furniture.

Maintenance factors into decision making. Many outdoor cushion covers are removable and machine washable, which makes it easier to keep them clean after spills or exposure to pollen and dust.

Some fabrics are treated with stain-resistant coatings that allow liquids to bead up rather than soak in.

Outdoor rugs benefit from materials that can be rinsed with a hose or scrubbed lightly with soap and water. Choosing fabrics that dry quickly helps prevent odors and mildew from forming.

MATCHING FABRICS TO THE SPACE

Color and pattern choices

can create a design in which fabrics blend with the surrounding landscape. Neutral tones often complement natural materials such as wood, stone and greenery, while bold patterns can add personality to patios or poolside seating areas.

Heavier fabrics work well for seat cushions that receive frequent use, while lighter materials may be suitable for decorative pillows or shade panels.

Keeping Decks Comfortable

Sunny decks and patios can be inviting gathering spots in the summer, but when surfaces absorb heat all day, they can quickly become uncomfortable.

Fortunately, a few thoughtful design choices can help keep outdoor living areas cooler while maintaining style and functionality. From shade structures to plantings, homeowners have several ways to reduce heat buildup and make their outdoor spaces more comfortable during warm weather.

CHOOSE MATERIALS THAT REFLECT HEAT

The materials used on decks and patios play a major role in how much heat builds up. Dark surfaces absorb more sunlight, often becoming too hot to walk on barefoot during peak afternoon hours. Lighter-colored materials, including pale stone, composite decking and light concrete finishes, reflect more sunlight and remain noticeably cooler.

Outdoor rugs designed for patios and decks can help reduce surface heat. Made from weather-resistant materials, these rugs create a barrier between feet and hot decking while adding color and texture to the space. Choosing lighter



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shades or woven patterns can further reduce heat absorption.

If replacing surfaces is not practical, applying a reflective sealant or stain designed for outdoor decking may help lower temperatures slightly while protecting the material from sun damage.

ADD SHADE WHERE IT COUNTS

Providing shade is one of the most effective ways to cool outdoor spaces. Large patio umbrellas are among the

simplest solutions, offering adjustable coverage that can move with the sun. Cantilever umbrellas are particularly useful because they provide wide shade without a center pole blocking seating areas.

Pergolas and shade sails are another popular option. These structures create partial shade while maintaining airflow, helping prevent heat from becoming trapped underneath. Some homeowners choose to grow climbing plants such as vines or flowering climbers

along pergolas, adding shade and visual appeal.

Retractable awnings can provide flexible protection from the sun while allowing homeowners to open the space when shade is not needed.

USE PLANTS TO CREATE NATURAL COOLING

Plants can dramatically influence the temperature of outdoor spaces. Large potted plants, small trees and tall ornamental grasses can help block direct sunlight and cre-

ate pockets of shade.

Strategically placing container gardens along the edge of a patio or deck can soften hard surfaces and reduce the amount of heat reflected upward. Vining plants trained along trellises or railings provide another layer of cooling while adding greenery.

Even surrounding garden beds can help. Lawns, shrubs and ground covers absorb less heat than concrete or stone, helping cool the air around nearby seating areas.

Edible Landscaping

For many homeowners, the garden is a place to relax, entertain and add curb appeal. With food prices constantly increasing, many people are transforming their floral gardens into a place to grow food.

Edible landscaping blends traditional ornamental design with fruits, vegetables and herbs, allowing gardeners to create beds that are both visually appealing and productive.

Instead of separating the vegetable patch from the flower garden, edible landscaping integrates both into a cohesive design. The result is a landscape that offers color, texture and seasonal variety while producing ingredients for the kitchen.

DESIGNING DELICIOUS SPACES

Many edible plants are naturally attractive and fit seamlessly into decorative beds. Kale and Swiss chard offer vibrant leaves in shades of green, purple and red. Lettuce varieties form soft, layered rosettes that work well along borders. Even vegetables like eggplant and peppers produce ornamental flowers and colorful fruit.

Herbs are especially



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versatile in landscape design. Rosemary can be shaped into low hedges, while thyme and oregano create fragrant ground covers. Basil, dill and parsley provide height and delicate foliage that pairs well with flowering plants.

Fruit-bearing plants can play a starring role in the garden's cast. Blueberry bushes offer spring blossoms, summer fruit and brilliant fall color. Strawberry plants spread into lush ground cover, and espaliered apple or pear trees can be trained along fences or walls for both structure and harvest.

When planning an edible landscape, gardeners often think about layering. Taller plants, such as tomatoes or trellised beans, can anchor the back of a bed. Medium-height herbs and leafy greens fill the middle, while compact plants like strawberries or creeping thyme soften the edges.

BALANCING BEAUTY AND PRODUCTIVITY

One key to successful edible landscaping is choosing plants that thrive in the same conditions. Most vegetables and fruits need plenty of sunlight,

so beds placed in full sun tend to offer the best yields. Soil preparation makes a difference.

Because edible plants are grown for consumption, gardeners often focus on enriching soil with compost and organic matter rather than relying heavily on synthetic fertilizers.

Spacing and succession planting can help maintain the garden's appearance throughout the season. As one crop finishes, another can be planted in its place, ensuring that beds remain full and vibrant.

A GARDEN THAT FEEDS THE SENSES

Edible landscaping can transform the experience of spending time outdoors. The scent of herbs warming in the sun, the colors of ripening fruit and the simple act of gathering ingredients just steps from the kitchen all add another dimension to a home landscape.

For many gardeners, edible landscaping offers the best of both worlds. It allows them to cultivate a beautiful yard while also enjoying the satisfaction of growing fresh food, proving that a garden can nourish both the eye and the table.

Attracting Birds and Butterflies

A summer garden can be more than a beautiful outdoor space. It can become a welcoming habitat for birds, butterflies and other beneficial wildlife.

By choosing the right plants and adding a few simple features, homeowners can transform their yards into lively environments that support local ecosystems while adding color and movement to the landscape.

Creating a wildlife-friendly yard does not require a large property or elaborate design. Even small gardens, patios and balconies can offer food, water and shelter that attract visiting creatures throughout the warmer months.

PLANTING FOR POLLINATORS AND BIRDS

Plants are the foundation of any wildlife-friendly landscape. Native flowers, shrubs and grasses are especially valuable because they provide the nectar, seeds and shelter that local species depend on.

Butterflies are drawn to nectar-rich flowers such as coneflowers, milkweed, black-eyed Susans and bee balm. Planting these in clusters makes them easier for pollinators to locate. Including a variety of plants that bloom at



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different times throughout the season helps ensure a steady supply of nectar from spring through fall.

Birds benefit from plants that produce seeds and berries. Sunflowers, ornamental grasses and seed-bearing flowers provide natural food sources.

Shrubs such as serviceberry, elderberry and dogwood offer fruit and protective cover for nesting birds.

Leaving some plant stems and seed heads in place as summer transitions into fall can provide food and shelter for wildlife.

ADDING FEEDERS AND WATER SOURCES

Feeders are another easy way to attract birds to the yard. Tube feeders filled with sunflower seeds appeal to a wide variety of species, while hummingbird feeders filled with a simple sugar-water mixture attract these tiny, fast-moving visitors.

Clean feeders regularly and place them near shrubs or trees so birds have a safe place to perch and watch for predators.

Water is equally important for wildlife. A simple birdbath can provide birds and butter-

flies with a place to drink and bathe. Shallow dishes with stones allow butterflies to rest while sipping water. For larger yards, small fountains or garden ponds can become a centerpiece that supports many types of wildlife.

Refreshing water frequently and keeping it clean helps maintain a healthy environment for visiting animals.

CREATING SAFE SPACES

Shelter helps make gardens friendly to wildlife. Dense shrubs, hedges and small trees give birds a place to hide from predators and build

nests. Brush piles or garden corners left slightly untamed can provide valuable habitat for insects and other small creatures that form part of the food chain.

By combining plants, feeders, water sources and safe shelter, homeowners can create outdoor spaces that support local wildlife while enriching the garden experience.

The reward often arrives in the form of fluttering wings, birdsong and the quiet satisfaction of knowing the yard has become part of a thriving natural community.

Inspecting Your Roof

Summer is an ideal time for homeowners to take a closer look at the condition of their roofs.

Warmer weather and longer daylight hours make it easier to spot potential problems before they lead to costly damage. A simple seasonal inspection can help identify worn shingles, damaged flashing or clogged gutters that might allow water to seep into the home.

While major repairs require involving professional roofing contractors, routine visual checks can help homeowners catch issues early and schedule repairs before storms or heavy rain create bigger problems.

LOOK FOR SHINGLE DAMAGE

Shingles are the roof's first line of defense against the elements. Over time, sun exposure, wind and seasonal temperature changes can cause shingles to curl, crack or loosen.

Homeowners can often spot trouble from the ground using binoculars or by carefully observing the roofline. Missing shingles, uneven patches or areas where the granules appear worn away may signal the need for repair or replacement.

Granules protect asphalt shingles from ultraviolet damage, so when they begin to wear away, shingles may



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deteriorate more quickly. If loose granules are visible in gutters or at the base of downspouts, it may be worth having a professional evaluation.

CHECK FLASHING AND ROOF PENETRATIONS

Flashing — the thin metal installed around chimneys, vents, skylights and roof joints — helps keep water from entering vulnerable areas. If flashing becomes bent, loose

or corroded, water may find a path underneath shingles and into the structure below. Homeowners should look for visible gaps, rust or lifted edges around these areas. Any signs of water stains on ceilings or in the attic may indicate that flashing needs attention.

Because flashing repairs often involve lifting shingles or resealing joints, professional assistance is usually recom-

mended for this type of work.

DON'T FORGET THE GUTTERS

Gutters and downspouts play an important role in directing water away from the roof and foundation. When gutters become clogged with leaves, twigs or roofing debris, rainwater can back up under shingles or spill over the sides.

Cleaning gutters during summer helps ensure they are

ready to handle sudden storms. While clearing debris, homeowners can check for loose brackets, sagging sections or leaks along the gutter seams. Downspouts should extend far enough from the home's foundation to carry water safely away from the structure.

Regular roof inspections may take only a short time, but they can prevent small issues from becoming expensive repairs.

Preparing for Summer Guests

Summer often brings a welcome parade of visitors, from weekend houseguests to neighbors stopping by for an evening on the patio.

A few simple updates can transform indoor and outdoor spaces so that they are comfortable, inviting and ready for company.

Preparing for guests does not have to involve major renovations. Small touches — fresh linens, tidy outdoor seating and thoughtful amenities — can make visitors feel at home while helping hosts enjoy the gathering just as much.

REFRESH THE GUEST ROOM

If your home includes a dedicated guest room, a quick seasonal refresh can make the space feel welcoming and comfortable. Lightweight bedding is a good place to start. Swapping heavy blankets for breathable cotton or linen sheets keeps guests cool during warm nights.

Adding a bedside lamp, a small clock and a place to charge phones or other devices can make a room more functional. A few thoughtful extras, such as a basket with travel-size toiletries, bottled water or local information about nearby attractions, can help visitors settle in quickly.

If space allows, clearing a



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drawer or section of closet space gives guests room to unpack and feel less like they are living out of a suitcase.

CREATE COMFORTABLE OUTDOOR GATHERING SPACES

During the summer, much of the socializing naturally shifts outdoors. Preparing patios, decks and backyard seating areas ahead of time makes hosting easier. Start

with a quick cleaning. Wipe down patio furniture, wash outdoor cushions and sweep surfaces to remove pollen, dust and debris. Checking for loose screws or worn chair legs can prevent surprises when guests arrive.

Shade is another important detail. Umbrellas, pergolas or shade sails can keep seating areas comfortable during sunny afternoons. Adding outdoor rugs and

weather-resistant pillows creates a cozy atmosphere that encourages guests to linger.

Outdoor lighting makes a difference. String lights, lanterns or solar pathway lights can transform a backyard into an inviting evening setting while improving safety around walkways and steps.

ADD SIMPLE HOSTING TOUCHES

A few thoughtful details can

make gatherings run more smoothly. Setting up a drink station or beverage cooler allows guests to help themselves without crowding the kitchen. Outdoor trays and serving carts make it easier to move food and drinks between indoor and outdoor spaces.

Stocking up on essentials such as sunscreen, bug spray and extra towels can be helpful, especially for homes with pools or nearby lakes.