



COVID-19 RESPONSE
Outdoor Living

Fire Pits Create Intimate Sanctuaries

In this season of coronavirus, when we've all been forced to reorganize work and life at home into a sometimes uncomfortable mix, sanctuary takes on a different meaning.

Fortunately, the warmer weather of spring and summer has arrived to rescue us — at least from an enclosed sanctuary into the fresh outdoors.

So what better time to take stock of your outdoor living arrangements and make them even more friendly spaces for cooking, entertaining and relaxing. If you're fortunate enough to have a larger outdoor living space — and even if you do not — here are some suggestions to help make enduring semi-isolation amid the virus a more palatable experience.

Just because the weather has turned warmer, doesn't mean you can't enjoy the warmth and mesmerizing glow a fire pit can create. Fire pits can give even the most ordinary outdoor living spaces a cozy, stylish, zen-like feel that can be enjoyed all year long. Here are a few options to consider.

TYPES

Gas fire pits optimize outdoor living because they can be built into attractive furnishings, such as built-in tables,



© ADOBE STOCK

tabletops or set into decorative tables around your space. Gas fire pits are easy to maintain and make creating outdoor fire a breeze. Just flick a switch for instant ambiance.

Traditional wood-burning pits are favored by many who love the smell and crackle of wood. Wood-burning pits can be as ornate and elaborate as you like or as easy as a cauldron-style pit that can be moved to whatever location you prefer.

OUTDOOR DESIGN

Fire pits are about gatherings — long nights relaxing outdoors, conversation over a bottle of wine or a nightcap. Comfortable seating is essen-

tial, but the design and landscaping have few bounds. Here are some popular designs that can be created to fit any space.

Modern outdoors spaces featuring such touches as sleek metal furniture are perfectly accented by such accents as rectangular fire pits in any style of polished stone, or upgrade with the modern elegance of marble. Even more drama can be achieved with black lava or glass chips taking the place of heat-resistant rocks often found in fire pits.

Conversation pits, centered around comfortable chairs or loungers featuring such elements as curved stone walls with built-in planters or a

back-to-nature feel created by flagstone and brick-lined pits, create an especially intimate setting. The pit radiates warmth for the circle and the enclosed feel adds an extra element of privacy outdoors.

Smaller outdoor space can also enjoy the comfort, warmth and inviting atmosphere created by the addition of a fire pit by choosing a pit that can fit virtually anywhere.

Chimera-style fire pits can create instant ambiance and a focal piece on any patio deck or backyard space. Rustic terra cotta finishes make for an especially attractive pit, offering a visually compelling center opening and reactor-style chimney on a metal base.

A more upscale look can be achieved with modern circular fire pits made of cast iron. Set it off with comfy, deep-cushioned furniture or surround it with tall plants to bring a woodsy feel closer. Or create a relaxing meditation spot with smaller, portable fire pits sitting atop an area filled with pebble or gravel.

Finally, bring the luxury of fire pits to literally any spot outdoors or indoors with a tabletop pit. The flames dance off glass walls and can be inset into a wide variety of decorative tabletop designs to accentuate any area. Another tip: drape strings of lights around your patio pit area to create an even warmer glow.

Tips for Safe Riding

The good news for cyclists and outdoor enthusiasts in general is that enjoying riding for pleasure and exercise carries very little risk of exposure, if you follow some simple guidelines.

Cycling offers the great benefit of brisk activity that gets you out of the house and keeps your immune system in top fighting shape against viruses. However, it's a myth that you can exercise away any symptoms developing for the new coronavirus or any virus.

According to David Nieman, a health professor at Appalachian State University and director of the Human Performance Lab at the North Carolina Research Campus, you simply cannot sweat out illness, he told *Bicycling Magazine*.

But he and other health professionals cited in an article on safe cycling amid coronavirus offered encouragement and advice for those ready to get out and enjoy the spring and summer sunshine.

GOING OUT FOR A RIDE: IS IT SAFE?

Yes, say these health experts, if you follow some common-sense rules for your ride. Until conditions change, you're better off riding alone in less crowded areas and on a familiar route. Limit your ride to



© ADOBE STOCK

30-60 minutes at a time when there are fewer people likely to be around — and carry a mask should you encounter a crowded situation where you might develop risks from exposure.

WEARING A MASK WHILE RIDING

The entire idea behind the one effective strategy we know to reduce or eliminate exposure to the virus is creating as much space as possible between people. While different states have now adopted different guidelines for public safety, the CDC still recommends wearing a cloth mask in

public when distancing can't be fully achieved. It protects other people and, if others wear a mask, it protects you. That said, if you're riding solo in an area where there are few or no people, it doesn't make sense to wear one. But always carry a mask. Since riding causes excess droplets to be expelled into the atmosphere, they also recommend a buff (a sort of all purpose headband that can extend into a mask) or a moisture-wicking mask.

RIDING DURING SHELTER-IN-PLACE

There aren't many exercise

options that can meet the standards of distancing set down under even shelter-in-place orders. In many states still under those orders, exercise in the form of such activities as solo riding is encouraged. But always look toward local public health officials for guidance.

THE GREAT UNKNOWN

While scientists are learning more about the novel coronavirus and COVID-19, the disease it causes, there is still much that is not known. Social distancing is necessary, it is known, because the virus is

easily and quickly transmitted by respiratory droplets, especially when people cough or sneeze. Other unknowns also exist. For instance, it is not yet known if the virus lives on clothing.

The bottom line is the pandemic has created a new normal we're forced to confront and deal with. By practicing these tips and the general guidelines set by the CDC, which can be found at [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov), and by following the specific orders and requirements set by your local government, you can freely take advantage of the many benefits of cycling.

Grilling Brings us Together

Grilling outdoors is one of the many classic summer activities that have been questioned under the present conditions.

While viruses are rarer in foods than bacteria, a well-known foe of those handling raw meats, it remains unclear if the new coronavirus can be transmitted by food — though it's important to note that no cases have yet been documented.

On top of food safety issues, grilling is among those outdoor living activities best enjoyed by groups of people. But if you can't necessarily invite people over for a cook-out, you can still enjoy the grill preparing savory meals for you and your family. Since you're all together, there's no reason your immediate family can't enjoy the outdoors and the smell of meats and other foods wafting from the grill.

It can also be said that a new phenomenon — driveway grilling — has brought communities together. Pre-virus, driveways and front porches were not the most desirable location to while away an afternoon leisurely tending to slow-cooking meats. Whole neighborhoods have come alive with activity often not seen before quarantine while everyone keeps a respectful distance, including



© ADOBE STOCK

the once solitary pursuit of driveway grilling that is now a front-yard activity.

So while you maintain recommended distances and wear a mask when you can't, this new coronavirus should not spoil the rite of summer. Here are some new grill choices on the market that can help you get your grilling mojo back. Join the front-yard grilling crowd with a portable or conventional grill and take advantage of new innovations in grilling. There are some new options available on the market this summer, as reviewed by Good Housekeeping.

PORTABLE GRILL

The Napoleon Travel Q scored very high in Good Housekeeping tests. It turned out a medium rare steak with distinct grill marks quickly, and produced golden brown chicken quarters with virtually no charring when cooked for 20 minutes over medium heat, the magazine said. Relatively small and easy to fold up for travel, the grates can fit 16 burgers and the domed shape allows for thicker cuts of meat with barely any flare ups and minimal smoke, according to GH.

GOOD FOR BEGINNERS

The Char-Broil Commercial

Tru-Infrared Gas Grill grill heated quickly and evenly and didn't flare up once, the reviewers at GH found. It turned on with no effort at all, and got hot enough to sear steak and chicken without burning it. This model features Char-Broil's Tru-Infrared technology, which is basically a large metal plate that sits below the cooking grates and traps the foods' juices as it cooks. Once the juices hit the plate, they steam and infuse the food with more flavor. Results were juicy and not dry. The entire grill was easy to move around when it was time to store away or rotate away

from the wind, said reviewers.

ICONIC CLASSIC

The Original Kettle Premium Charcoal Grill by Weber is an icon and well-loved by consumers, so it's unsurprising it's a best-seller. At under \$200, it's powered by charcoal and features an ash tray below the grill that's easy to refill for continuous cooking. The structure is sturdy with solid accessories and a removable lid that can be rested on the side of the grill, according to the review in GH, and it can be rolled around easily for convenience and storage in the off-season.

Fishing Restrictions Relaxed

Fishing amid the pandemic? While many states banned fishing temporarily as the lockdown began in order to deter gatherings, the broad answer now, to the delight of many, is yes — with relaxed restrictions that vary from state to state.

According to the fishing website *On the Water*, most states are encouraging fishermen to spend time on the water provided they maintain standard safety measures. Like several sports, fishing is often all about “social distancing,” as it is an often solitary activity.

In addition to meeting and exceeding that standard, fishing almost always provides stress relief and a boost for mental health. That doesn't mean, however, that you can abandon guidelines. Here are a few suggested by the site specific to those ready to enjoy fishing.

- Stay home if you are sick or showing or feeling any COVID-19 symptoms, such as fever, coughing or troubled breathing
- Practice social distancing by keeping at least 6 feet of distance between yourself and others. A good way to measure this is with your fishing pole.



© ADOBE STOCK

Hold the pole straight out in front you. If you can turn in a circle without hitting anyone, that is a safe distance.

- Follow CDC guidelines, such as wearing a mask in public.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash hands often or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol when soap and water are not available.
- Drive to your fishing spots only with your immediate

family members and only if everyone is feeling well.

- Don't share fishing gear with others. Each angler should have their own fishing gear (rod and reels, bait, lures, towels, pliers and other personal items).

Also remember, while it's extremely safe on the water by yourself, other risks do present themselves.

Travel, fueling and crowds on boat ramps can be conduits for exposure to the virus. You'll also find that while

many ramps might be open, public facilities such as restrooms are not. Experts recommend you wear a mask in public around others, as well as gloves to protect yourself from touching objects that might be contaminated.

While it's true many enjoy fishing by themselves, others associate time on the water with the company of a buddy or two. Minimizing contact during these types of outings can be a challenge. You should agree to fish at opposite ends

of the boat and to avoid sharing tackle or any food or beverages you take along for the trip.

Even the close proximity of sharing a ride could present some risk. If you choose to do so, wear masks and keep the windows down to allow air to circulate out of the vehicle.

As with any activity outside your home the guidance is clear — enjoy the fresh air and mental health benefits, but follow common sense and take precautions.

Back on the Links

Like the other activities listing in this special section, golfing seems made for social distancing, a sport that can be enjoyed alone. Still the social aspect of golf led to the shutdown of courses, tournaments and, of course, professional golf as the virus quickly accelerated in the U.S.

In several states that never issued stay-at-home orders, golfing went on. But most have weathered the effects of the new coronavirus at home, where golfers were restricted to putting and practicing swings. Now, as the country is emerging from restrictions, golfers are eager to get back on the links.

Rules for getting back on courses vary from state to state, some stricter than others, but all with the goal of prohibiting spread of the disease. For instance, as NPR recently reported, golf pros in Washington state had to police tees for unauthorized gatherings on the course. In other states, such as Massachusetts, the final state to lift its ban, golfers had to remain in their cars before teeing off and quickly return after completing their round. Still other states simply hope golfers would comply with varying levels of guidance.

Still, after months of being mostly prohibited, golfers seem exuberant to get back to playing even under restrictions. Like any business, however, golf courses suffer the economic impact caused by the virus and the ensuing lockdowns, and some will not reopen.

Expect and prepare for general restrictions when it comes to areas of



© ADOBE STOCK

congregation, such as clubhouses, restaurants, bars and pro shops. These restrictions, of course, will be guided by state and local rules, as well as those rules the course feels necessary to protect both patrons and staff.

Carts, specifically, have become off limits for obvious reasons. But even before the virus, many golfers were taking an approach to the course in a traditional way — walking it — giving rise to a legion of golfers finding new ways to lighten the load of their bags.

Here are some recent product suggestions from Golf Magazine to consider adding to your bag to make life on the course more enjoyable even while restrictions remain in place.

Portable speakers: Many are now designed for much longer life off a

charge or on a battery, and most are waterproof. They're small enough to fit in your pocket, but clip it to your bag. You'll enjoy your favorite music while you play without creating loud noise.

Golf socks: An extra pair of socks is a good idea any time, as many golfers are always just a blister away from a ruined round. But these days, when you can't easily limp back to the pro shop for a pair, they're essential.

Portable tumbler: New tumblers can keep beverages cold for hours on end. So while the bar and beverage cart might be out of reach at the moment, you can still enjoy your favorite drink along your walk. Another essential: pack a quality reusable bottle to keep hydrated.

Folding chair: A good lightweight

folding chair can easily be attached to your push cart without adding much weight. On a long walk, you'll thank yourself for the addition.

Range finder: Without a golf cart GPS system to rely on, you'd be wise to invest in a personal range finder. The better models define distances refined down to the decimal and some offer features such as slope compensation and vibration when a flag is detected.

Divot repair bottle: A handy free addition, easily made by filling a sports drink bottle with a mix of sand, topsoil and grass seed. The bottle ensures you can fill divots for the round, if not longer.

Safety: It almost goes without saying, but carry a cloth mask and a small bottle of hand sanitizer.

Life in an RV as States Open

RVs might have seemed like the perfect escape. What better way to easily evacuate a troubling virus hot spot than in an RV, stocked with supplies and ready to roll.

But the reality is that travel restrictions, stricter camping enforcement along with the stress of finding provisions have left even experienced RVers in a fix.

Fortunately, the RV lifestyle, one built around resiliency and problem-solving, has served most well. Even as restrictions have eased in most every state, however, navigating fluctuating circumstances on the road can be very challenging.

Now, restrictions are starting to lift in many places around the country, but some parks and camping spots may still be closed. Almost all will surely be operating with new rules. But the joys of RVing remain undiminished.

“The RV experience itself becomes the vacation — that’s the positive,” Karen Redfern, vice president of brand marketing and communications for Recreational Vehicle Industry Association, said in a recent interview on the website PhocusWire. “When you open the door from your hotel room you see the hotel hall-



© ADOBE STOCK

way. But when you open the door from an RV — what’s in front of you? You get to pick.”

Karen Finan, a writer for the Austin American-Statesman and a now-experienced rental RVer, offered these tips for RVers, whether you’re an RV owner or renter.

Know your vehicle ahead of time. The more you know about your RV — from the engine and important maintenance to how to make the best use of technology and maximizing space inside the RV — the better prepared you’ll be for life on the road.

Pack like you’re glamping.

Taking extras like home-quality dishes and silverware to bed linens will make your travel trip even more comfortable and the RV will seem even homier. Bring plenty of chargers, DVDs and games if you’re traveling with kids — plus extra blankets and pillows.

Enjoy the journey. In addition to experiencing new vistas across the country, life on the road offers its own almost-endless road-trip vibe, from long-conversations to deep dives into trivia and even the tranquility offered by the hum of the road across long,

open spaces where there are fewer cars.

Reserve campsites in advance. Check the websites listed in this article to ensure parks and campgrounds are open and accepting reservations. Campsites can also give you information on local conditions and the best places for fuel and provisions in the area.

Here are some websites that can help you plan your trip.

Campendium.com lists locations and reviews from RVers on RV parks, free camping spots, national parks and forests, and state parks. Visit the site now and you’ll begin

to see updates on opening statuses and recent reviews.

RootlessLiving.com maintains a color-coded list for at-a-glance planning to see which states are most available for RVs in real time. It also has a state-by-state list of extended stay parks accepting RVers.

The National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds offers daily, state-specific updates about RV parks and campgrounds on their site at **ARVC.com**.

Other handy sites include **RVillage.com** and **ReserveAmerica.com**.

Prepare to Ride

The idea of safe distancing is well-known to motorcyclists. Smart bikers know how to make themselves visible to other drivers and when to take precautionary measures to protect themselves and their motorcycles.

So it's no surprise that motorcyclists would easily adapt to social distancing in the age of coronavirus. Under quarantine or self-isolation, or simply obeying stay-at-home orders, many turned their attention to bike maintenance and improvement projects to pass the time. But now many states are lifting restrictions, and motorcyclists are eager to get back on the road.

The American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) and the Motorcycle Safety Foundation have released statements recently, encouraging riders to get back on the road but to also remain aware of safety measures.

GET IN TOUCH WITH YOUR BIKE

The AMA implores riders to “adhere to local, state, and federal guidelines and restrictions, and take all necessary precautions,” but the organization also says that now is a great



© ADOBE STOCK

time to prepare to ride again.

“While some riders do routine maintenance at home, others may be wondering when their local dealer will reopen. The fact is, dealers in most states are available now to provide parts, service and sales in one form or another.”

Local dealers, like almost every business, have suffered from the economic impact of the shutdown and the continued restrictions. But if they're open, they're a great resource not only for parts available for delivery, but also to help keep you apprised of local conditions for motorcyclists.

Your dealer can put your mind at ease by telling you the measures they are taking to ensure your safety, such as phone or online orders, social distancing, drop-off procedures and more, the AMA says. You can schedule the services you need in advance, avoiding the inevitable delays that will occur once authorities issue the all-clear signal. Dealers can help you get back on your bike, and your patronage will help them.

If you're shopping for a new bike, ask dealers about manufacturer home-delivery programs being offered by many

top brands such as Harley, Honda, Indian and Kawasaki.

MOTORCYCLE AWARENESS MONTH

Motorcyclists are in a great position to quickly return to riding as the country opens. The freedom of the open road beckons, and riders are naturally inclined to take safety seriously.

May is Motorcycle Awareness Month, and the AMA urges other drivers to be aware of motorcycles on the nation's roads and highways.

“Although a number of states have travel restrictions in place

due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many riders use a motorcycle as their primary vehicle, commuting to essential jobs, making deliveries and running errands,” AMA President and CEO Rob Dingman said. “As travel restrictions are relaxed, many more motorcyclists will take to the nation's roads and highways, so we implore motorists to be on the lookout for motorcyclists.”

The Motorcycle Industry Council also maintains a helpful, updated list of conditions affecting motorcyclists in each state on their website at MIC.org.