

Outdoor Living





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Reinventing the S'more

S'mores are the perfect combination of sweet, gooey goodness.

The s'more doesn't need to be reinvented. It can be fun, however, to mix things up and put a new twist on this classic summer sweet.

SMALL CHANGES

Graham crackers, milk chocolate and a fire-roasted marshmallow is a winning combination. If you're making s'mores while camping, though, consider buying graham crackers or

cookies with the chocolate already incorporated, to keep transport and cleanup easier.

For a new taste, replace the milk chocolate with hazelnut chocolate spread. Add peanut butter to a classic s'more for a sweet-and-savory treat. Switch out the graham crackers for ginger snaps for a spicy version.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD

If you're more adventurous, you can completely overhaul the s'more. Put your roasted marshmallow on a skewer and then dip in melted chocolate and then graham cracker crumbs. Throw a completed s'more into the

blender with some ice cream and milk for a s'more milkshake.

FROZEN S'MORES

TheMaverickObserver.com offers this recipe for a frozen take on the original s'more.

Ingredients

1 pint (2 cups) vanilla ice cream
12 whole graham crackers
2 cups mini marshmallows
1/2 cup mini chocolate chips

Directions

1. Preheat your broiler to high.
2. Spray a rimmed baking sheet with non-

stick cooking spray. Spread the marshmallows on the baking sheet and broil until deep brown, about 30 seconds. Remove from the oven and set aside for 10 minutes to cool.

3. Using a stand mixer or hand mixer, beat ice cream on medium-low speed, just until soft. Add the toasted marshmallows, mini chocolate chips, and 3 of the graham crackers (broken up into small pieces) and mix on low, until just combined.

4. If your ice cream mixture has softened up too much, place it in the freezer until it is no longer soupy. Otherwise, work quickly and start composing your ice cream sandwiches.

5. Freeze until firm, at least two hours, and serve.

Hardscaping Trends

Cookie-cutter stone patios are out. Bold patterns and designs that draw heavily on nature are on trend, as well as smart features that make our outdoor living spaces feel like our increasingly automated homes.

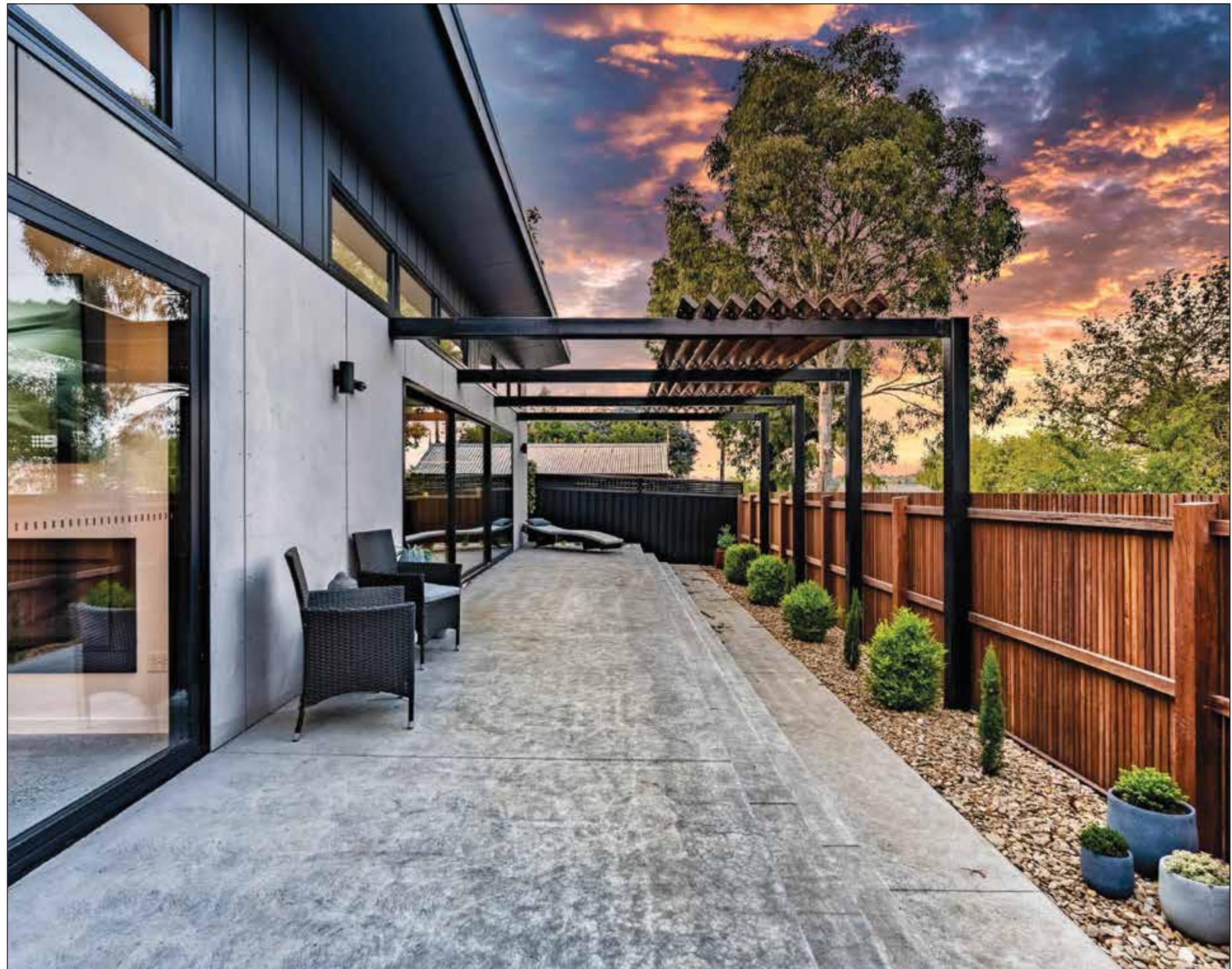
If you're planning a hardscaping project this year, here's a look at some trends that are changing the way we live outdoors.

BIOPHILIC AND SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

Biophilic design recognizes and nurtures humans' innate relationship with nature. Elements of biophilic design include biomimicry — the use of structures found in nature — and incorporating patinas and weathering. This goes hand in hand with the trend of using natural and sustainable materials, such as permeable pavers, recycled concrete, recycled rubber edging and bamboo decking. Pair biophilic design with sustainable landscaping choices, such as planting native plants and smart irrigation practices.

SMART FEATURES

Our phones already control our garage doors, lamps and thermostats, so it makes sense



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to implement smart features in our outdoor living spaces, as well. This can include smartphone-controlled lights, sprinklers, speakers, security cameras and more. Turn on the patio lights, put on some music and pre-heat the grill at the touch of a button. Smart features can

provide both convenience and safety and security.

BOLD COLORS AND PATTERNS

Geometric stone designs, as well as artistic tile layouts such as mosaics and inlays, are on trend. Bold colors are also pop-

ular right now. Consider using intricate patterns and striking colors on accent walls or on a tile mosaic fountain or a backyard art installation.

GOING UP

Using vertical space is one way to make a small deck or

patio feel bigger.

Pergolas, trellises and vertical planters can all provide much-needed usable space and draw the eye upward. While you're going vertical, consider vertical gardening, whether with flowers or foliage, to bring color to new heights.

Summer Appetizers

Summer's in-season fruits and vegetables make it easy to whip up fresh, brightly colored appetizer options for your barbecues, picnics and parties.

Be sure to keep the appetizers covered to keep flies, wasps and other pests away. Either tent with foil or, for a more polished look, buy mesh food covers specifically designed for the task. Start with whatever produce is in season. Even better if you can buy locally for maximum freshness, or pick produce from your very own garden.

CHEF'S SALAD ON A STICK

Recipe is from ThePioneerWoman.com.

Ingredients

4 hardboiled eggs
 1/2 English cucumber
 2 ounces deli ham, thick cut
 2 ounces deli turkey breast, thick cut
 2 ounces deli roast beef, thick cut
 8 ounces swiss cheese block
 1 head red leaf lettuce
 16 grape tomatoes
 8 large green olives
 8 12-inch skewers
 Ranch dressing
 Black pepper

Directions

1. Cut each hardboiled egg into four pieces. Slice the cucumber

lengthwise, then cut into half circles, about 1/2-inch thick.

2. Cut the ham, turkey and roast beef slices lengthwise into 1-inch wide strips. Roll each strip up into a pinwheel.

3. Cut the Swiss cheese block into 16 squares.

4. Alternating pieces, place 2 pieces each of Swiss cheese, cucumber, tomato and egg; 1 pinwheel each of ham, turkey, and roast beef; and 3 pieces of lettuce, each folded up into a bundle, on each skewer. Finish each skewer

with 1 green olive.

5. Serve on a platter drizzled with ranch dressing and sprinkled with black pepper. Serve immediately.

PEACH BRUSCHETTA

Recipe is from FoodNetwork.com.

Ingredients

1 French baguette, sliced 1/4 inch thick
 1/4 cup olive oil
 1 pound large peaches, cut into

small dice

2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
 1/4 cup honey
 1 teaspoon apple cider vinegar
 1 teaspoon hot sauce, plus more as desired
 4 ounces goat cheese

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.
 2. Lay the baguette pieces in a single layer on a parchment-lined

baking sheet, brush both sides with 3 tablespoons of the olive oil and bake until golden brown, 15 to 18 minutes.

3. In a medium bowl, toss together the peaches, basil, salt and remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil.

4. Whisk together the honey, vinegar and hot sauce in a small bowl, adding more hot sauce to taste.

5. To build the bruschetta, start with a piece of baguette, spread with the goat cheese, spoon on some peaches and top with the hot honey.



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Hot Tub Buying Tips

When buying a hot tub, the first thing you will notice is the wide price range of units. This is due to the availability of seemingly endless options.

If it's your first time buying a spa, start by visiting local retailers to find out what they offer. Collect information, see the units in person, and then give yourself an education about hot tubs. Here are some factors to consider.

CONSTRUCTION

Consider the internal construction of the hot tub. Wood could potentially rot over time. Better long-term options are ABS plastic or galvanized steel. Also look into the liner's construction. Acrylic is durable but heavy. Rotomolded plastic is durable and affordable. Vinyl is more affordable than acrylic but has a shorter lifespan.

Look for good insulation to keep heating costs down.

JETS

The configuration of the jets in your hot tub can greatly affect your experience. If you're looking to target certain muscles or painful areas of your body, you might want to look at models with customizable jets. Consider whether the intensity of the jets is customizable.



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FILTRATION AND CHLORINATION

While hot tubs in the past have been treated with regular pool chemicals, or with specialty spa chemicals, some manufacturers have streamlined the process of keeping your spa's water clean and balanced. Some models feature a cartridge that includes the minerals and chlorine your spa needs, and it's as simple as

replacing them each month. Ask your local retailer which options they offer and consider the pros and cons.

OPTIONS

Consider all the options available. This might include a small waterfall feature, lighted cupholders, controls located near each jet, upgraded stairs, integrated speakers and more. Think about how you plan to

use your spa and which features are worth the higher price tag.

SHOP LOCAL

Local pool and spa stores often sell major national brands. The benefit of buying local is that you make a connection for future service and repair needs, as well as help with balancing your spa's water and figuring out which chemicals you need.

DO A WET TEST

A wet test is when you actually take a dip in a hot tub from the brand you're considering buying. This is your chance to try out the product and figure out what you like. You may not be able to wet test the exact model you are considering buying, but it will give you a general idea of the options. Try different types of jets, seating configurations and options.

Grilling with a Cedar Plank

Grilling on a cedar plank both imparts a smoky flavor to grilled meats and enhances their juiciness.

Although you often see recipes for cedar plank salmon, the technique is versatile, working well with other proteins and vegetables, as well.

Be sure to soak the plank in water for one hour before putting it on the grill, and if you want more smoky flavor, char one side of the plank first, then flip it and put the food on the charred side.

Here are two cedar plank recipes to get you started.

PLANK-GRILLED VEGETABLES

Recipe is from FireandFlavor.com.

Ingredients

Marinade

3 tablespoons rice wine vinegar
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
½ teaspoon salt
½ cup fresh herbs (such as basil, oregano, and mint)

Plank-Grilled Vegetables

2 pounds summer vegetables, cut into 1-inch pieces
2 Fire & Flavor Cedar Planks, soaked

Directions

1. Combine vinegar, oil, mustard, salt and herbs in a zip-top plastic bag. Place vegetables in marinade,



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tossing to coat. Marinate at room temperature for 15 minutes.

2. Preheat grill to 350° Fahrenheit or medium-low heat. Place planks on grill, close lid, and heat for 3 minutes. Flip planks, arrange vegetables on planks, close lid, and cook for 20 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Remove from grill, season plank-grilled vegetables with freshly ground black pepper, and serve.

CEDAR-PLANKED EGGPLANT PARMIGIANA

Recipe is from ProudItalianCook.com.

Ingredients

1 large eggplant, you'll need 12 slices to serve 4
8 slices fresh mozzarella
2 cups chunky marinara, homemade or store bought
¾ cup grated parmigiano reggiano cheese
¾ cup homemade bread crumbs or panko
Fresh basil
Olive oil
Cedar planks

Directions

1. Soak your cedar planks for 1 hour then pat dry and set aside.

2. Char the planks on one side for about 2 minutes on direct grilling long enough to darken and smoke but not burn, set aside.

3. Trim the top and bottom off the eggplant, then with a vegetable peeler, remove every other strip lengthwise.

4. Cut the eggplant crosswise ¼ inch thick. Brush olive oil on each side then season with salt and pepper then grill until slightly firm but softened.

5. Transfer the grilled eggplant slices to a rimmed sheet pan and let cool.

6. Assemble the parmigiana onto

the smoky planks.

7. Layer 1 slice eggplant then sauce spread on top, then 1 slice of fresh mozzarella, a sprinkling of the grated cheese and a few basil leaves. Repeat the second layer ending with an eggplant slice on the top, a dollop of sauce and topped off with the breadcrumbs then more grated cheese and a good drizzle of olive oil.

8. Place the planked stacks of parmigiana onto the grill using indirect heat until the cheese melts nice and gooey and the tops are browned, 10 or 15 minutes.

9. Serve on their planks.

An Outdoor Escape

Creating privacy outdoors can be the key to creating a relaxing atmosphere where you can really relax and get away from it all.

If a privacy fence is not an option — for example if you'd like to preserve the view, or if privacy fences are not allowed by your homeowner's association — consider these creative ways to carve out your own outdoor space.

CURTAINS

If you have an existing structure such as a pergola, add curtains in a weather-resistant fabric. In an area that experiences a lot of wind, be sure to buy curtains that have a grommet at the bottom corner of each panel to anchor the curtains to the ground. Some brands even include a weighted tie-down in a coordinating fabric.

DAYBEDS

Daybeds are a trendy way to provide private space outdoors. From a small wicker daybed with a folding canopy to a large double-size daybed with a teak canopy and weather-resistant curtains, there is a daybed to meet your needs. Expand your design theme to the daybed area with coordinating throw pillows, curtains or fabrics.

HANGING PLANTERS

Potted plants hung at vary-



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ing heights can help create a wall of privacy.

To keep costs low, opt for large foliage, such as ferns, or make a wall of color with bright blooms.

Another adaptation of this concept is a vertical pallet “wall” with mounted potted trailing plants.

PRIVACY SCREEN

For small areas that need privacy, privacy screens are available in a wide range of colors, materials and designs.

Some fold up for easy storage, and they can easily be moved around the yard to provide privacy wherever you need.

GREENERY

Whether real or faux, greenery can help block unwanted sight lines. Grow a vine on a fence to cover gaps, or install a wall of tall arbovitae evergreens to provide the privacy of a fence. Look for faux greenery mounted on a free-standing frame.

SHADE SAILS

Shade sails can help block prying eyes from above. Made of weather-resistant materials with heavy duty hardware, a shade sail can cover a large space at a relatively low price tag. You will need sturdy supports from which to hang the shade sails.

Responsible Bird Watching

Feeding birds and putting out bird baths can ensure that you have birds to watch all season long. With this benefit, however, comes responsibility.

“By inviting birds to our homes, we have a duty to keep them safe,” writes Audubon. “That means regularly cleaning feeders, making windows bird-safe, and taking other precautions.”

Here are some tips from Audubon and the National Wildlife Federation about how to be a responsible backyard bird watcher.

- Clean backyard feeders with hot water and dry them a few times each season.

Audubon even suggests cleaning out bird baths and feeders every two weeks with nine parts water to one part bleach to prevent the spread of disease. Rake or shovel and remove bird droppings and hulls from the ground below the feeder regularly.

- Try to position feeders a few feet from a bush or tree. This allows birds to safely wait nearby, then pick a few seeds and retreat to safety.

- Once you start feeding birds in the winter, it is best to stick with it. This is a time of year when birds need the most calories, and they will depend on you as a food source.

- If you stock up on seed to



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save money, keep it in a cool, dry place. Toss any seed that has gotten warm during storage as it can go bad and make birds sick.

- Make your windows safe for birds by applying decals spaced no more than two inches apart.

Mounting feeders within 3 feet of windows will also help prevent birds from building up enough momentum to injure themselves by flying into the window. Exterior screens are also effective in helping birds see windows better.

- Keep cats indoors. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that outdoor cats kill 2.4 billion wild birds each year in the U.S. Prevent this by keeping felines inside, or consider a “catio.”

- An abandoned bird bath

can breed disease and mosquitoes. Aside from cleaning the bath regularly, add more water every other day to prevent bugs from taking up residence. Even better, add a small garden fountain pump to keep the water circulating.