

Outdoor Living



Trends in Outdoor Life

When the weather warms up, outdoor life really blooms.

Spring weather can spur rejuvenations in the garden and in your outdoor space, too. If you're getting ready to get your hands dirty with a revamp of your outdoor space, here are some trends to keep an eye on.

GOING NATIVE

Meticulously manicured lawns are giving way to more wild, maximalist spaces. Look for a more natural space with pops of color and full, lush gardens. Try planting self-seeding plants and watch them explode. Choose native varieties that will thrive with a minimum of upkeep and maintenance on your part, leaving more time for relaxing.

BREAKING UP

Nonporous, hard surfaces are giving way, quite literally, to porous surfaces such as gravel. These surfaces help homeowners manage water more easily and can also help keep your yard a cool oasis under summer's hot sun. Porous alternatives to sand and gravel include plastic porous pavers, which also have the bonus of being made with recycled plastics.

ALL NATURAL

Wicker and rattan, two materials that are big on warm, organic vibes, are



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having a moment right now. It's not surprising given the preference in all designs for more biophilic, natural aesthetics. But this isn't your grandma's wicker and rattan. Look for sleek lines and bold colors. It goes beyond basic furniture, with the materials showing up in fencing, plant-

ers and more.

FIRE FEATURES

The water feature has long been a staple of outdoor living, but this year think about bringing the heat with a fireplace, firepit or other fire feature. They provide warmth and a stunning focal point for

your outdoor living space. There are plenty of options, including gas-fired, wood-fired and even electric fire features.

INCLUDING WELLNESS

Along with the environmentally friendly upgrades are those that help people live

better, too. These include saunas, cold-plunge pools and other wellness-friendly upgrades to your outdoor living space. And it doesn't have to be expensive. Consider something as simple as a wooden meditation platform or an intentional cleared space for yoga practice.

Big Gardens in Little Pots

You don't need wide open spaces to create a green paradise.

Even the tiniest patios can house big blooms with the right mix of containers. The trick to successful container gardening is knowing the right pots, the right soil and the right space.

CONTAINERS

First off, you'll need an assortment of containers that are the correct size for what you're wanting to grow. Edibles such as tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and beans should get at least a five-gallon container. Herbs and flowers can go smaller, depending on the size of the plantings. Start with one gallon and move up from there.

Even root veggies can go in containers if they're deep enough. Carrots and potatoes, which grow downward, will need a deeper pot than other plantings. And anything that will need support such as vining flowers or cucumbers will require a deeper container to balance out the lattice work it needs to grow.

If you're growing edible plants, fruits or vegetables, make sure your pots are food safe. All pots should also have adequate drainage and stand up to the weather in your area.

SOIL

Because these plants can't draw nutrients from the



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actual Earth, you'll need to provide good, high-quality potting soil. Potting soil differs from garden soil in that it doesn't compact as easily and drains water well, both important qualities for planting in a pot. Garden soil may bring with it pests and diseases that could kill your

garden before it even really starts.

Once you have the perfect soil, you need to nail the watering. Vegetables tend to be more thirsty than flowers, but the goal for both is to keep the soil damp but not soaking wet. Stick your finger into the soil about an inch. If the soil

feels dry, it's time to water. If it's moist, you can probably wait.

SPACE

Most fruiting vegetables, fruits and a lot of flowers need full sun, which means at least six hours of direct sunlight daily. Pick a location and

check it throughout the day to make sure it's getting enough sunlight for what you want to grow. Warm locations might even need shade in the heat of the afternoon so the plants don't roast. If you live in a hotter climate, try picking light-colored containers to keep your plants' roots cool.

Sustainable, Beautiful Green Roofs

A green roof system covers the roof of a building with plants.

It's not only beautiful, but is a great way to manage wastewater and stormwater, moderate a building's heat island effect, improve air quality and expand a building's usable space.

AN URBAN ECOSYSTEM

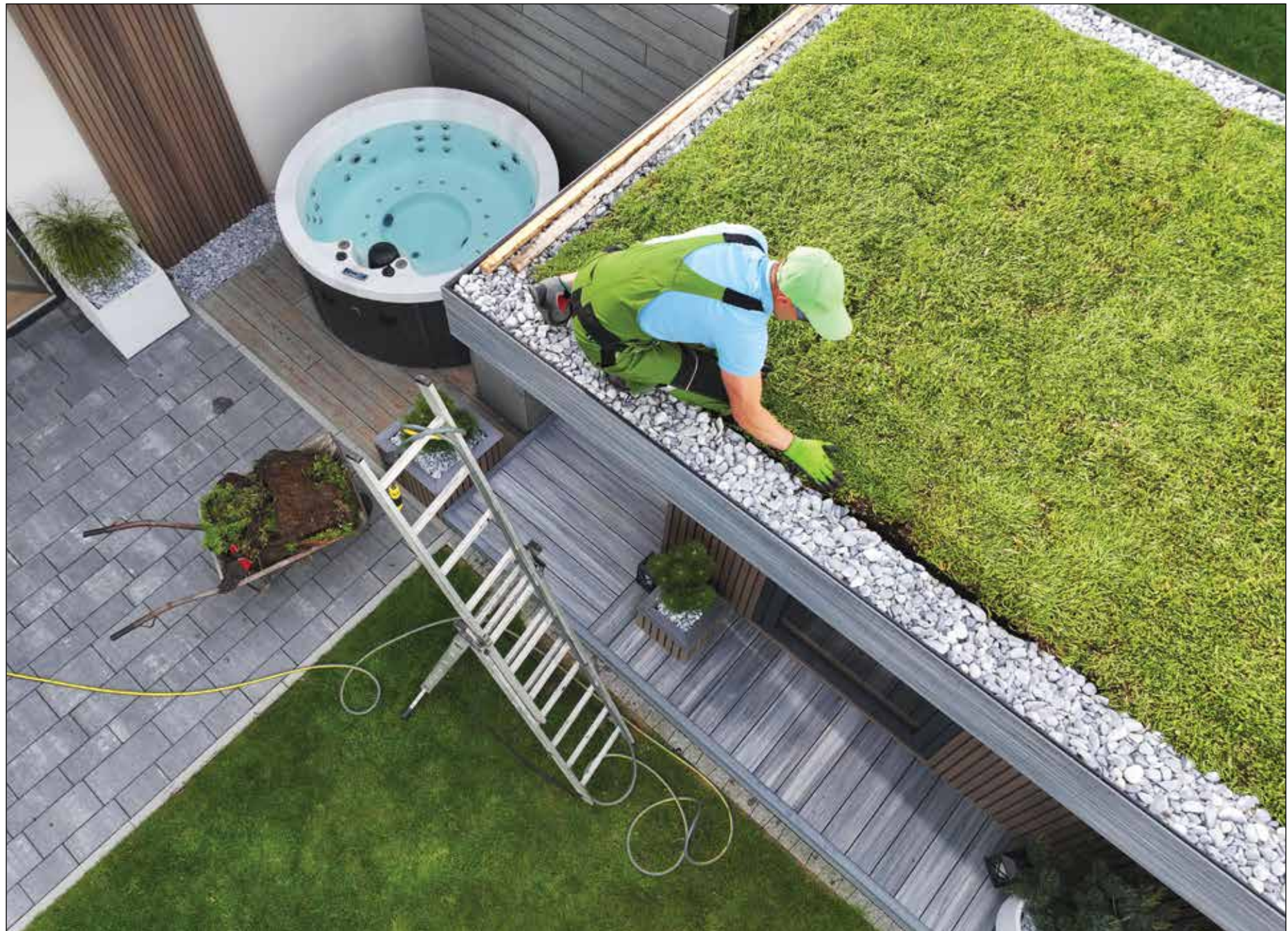
Green roofs include, from the base, the structural top of the roof, waterproofing, a root barrier, drainage layer, irrigation, growing medium and plants. Some green roof systems are modular, with everything already installed in movable, sometimes interlocking, grids. Or they can be customized and installed separately. These systems, when used on multiple buildings in a city, can improve the city's carbon footprint by churning out oxygen, filtering the air, reducing heat islands and helping manage water runoff.

WATER MANAGEMENT

Green roofs help soak up any precipitation that falls on them, and then it delays that runoff by its intense filtering process. That can decrease stress on a city's sewer and water management systems. The plants and substrates also filter that water, meaning any resulting runoff is cleaner than your average city puddle.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Green roofs can act as an



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insulator for the building, reducing the amount of energy needed to create comfort inside. The National Research Council of Canada found that an extensive green roof reduced the daily energy demand for air conditioning in the summer by more than 75%. This decreased usage helps the building's budget and can also prolong the life

of heating and cooling systems.

A ROOFTOP PARADISE

Green roofs are a great site for urban agriculture projects to create a local food system for the building. The rooftop garden can give students and visitors a biology lesson, increase the area's biodiversity and provide a space for

outdoor games and gatherings. Green roofs can include play spaces for kids and adults, such as playgrounds or a basketball court, or even just spaces to work out or meditate quietly.

BONUSES

A building with a green roof can be eligible for some environmental credits and

certification, such as LEED, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. LEED assesses the sustainability of buildings and can qualify the building for additional funding from governments. Some green roof projects can contribute as many as 15 points to a LEED score, depending on the systems used and already in place in the building.

Basics of Installing a Pool

In the hot summer months, nothing can cool you off like jumping into your family's own backyard oasis.

Unfortunately, not much about getting there is as easy as just diving in. Installing an in-ground pool can be a complicated process, one that definitely requires professional help. Plan for the process to take at least eight to 12 weeks. Here's what you can expect.

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

The first step is to determine the best pool for your family's needs. Then, you'll work with pool professionals to consider the dimensions and your available space. The team will mark where the pool will be installed. This will help both you and the excavation crew visualize where the space will be. This can help you see where construction may be affected by utilities, tree roots and more. Keep in mind that revisions may be required based on utilities and permitting, so be patient during this first step.

DIGGING

Once all local authorities have signed off, it's time to start digging. This is where you'll really start to see progress on your project. A team will start removing soil and other obstacles to your



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backyard oasis. Usually, experts say, this process takes anywhere from two days to a week of work. After the soil is removed, the pool installers will put in a support system for your new pool.

PLUMBING AND ELECTRIC

This is the beating heart of your pool project. Plumbing can be complicated depending on the design of your pool, so it's important that it's done correctly. A plumbing crew will install the circulation and

drainage system as well as the pool skimmer, jets and any water features. An electrical team will work on the lighting, electricity for the pool pump, heating and water features. Because of the proximity of electricity to water, make sure licensed professionals are working on this part of the job.

INSTALLING THE LINING

Next comes the lining for your pool. Custom pools are usually concrete poured into the support structure installed

after the digging. If concrete is being used, figure in curing time to your project's timeline. Other liner materials include fiberglass and vinyl. Vinyl pools are inexpensive, but may need to be replaced more often. Fiberglass pools are often built off-site and trucked in. Some liners can be customized in color and edging materials. Work with your design team to pick timeless colors and finishes that will add a rich depth to your project. Once the coatings are all dry, it's time to fill the pool

with water.

DECKING

Your pool team will work with you to choose a surrounding decking material that complements the rest of your space. The installation for that can take about a week, depending on the materials chosen and the size of the deck needed. The decking usually needs to be coated with a coat of paint or sealant to protect it. This is one of the last steps in the pool building project.

How to Start a Compost Pile

Composting is the managed biological decomposition of organic materials into a soil amendment that can deliver nutrients to your gardens.

In other words, it's turning trash into green thumb treasure.

BUILDING A COMPOST PILE

Composting includes the right balance of carbon-rich material (brown), nitrogen-rich material (green), water and air. Examples of browns include:

- Dry leaves.
- Plant stalks.
- Twigs.
- Shredded uncolored paper, such as brown bags or kraft paper.
- Shredded cardboard without the wax coatings, tape or glue.

- Untreated wood chips.

Examples of greens include:

- Fruit and vegetable scraps.
- Grass clippings.
- Coffee grounds and biodegradable coffee filters.
- Paper tea bags without staples.
- Crushed eggshells.

There are some things that should go straight to the garbage. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says these things should not be added to a backyard compost pile:

- Meat, fish or bones.
- Cheese and dairy products.



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- Fat, oil or grease.
- Cooked foods.
- Plants and grass treated with herbicides .
- Aggressive weeds or weeds with seeds (these will live in the compost and move to your garden).

- Diseased or pest-infested plants.
- Treated or painted wood.
- Pet waste and cat litter.
- Dryer lint.
- Glossy or colored paper.
- Produce stickers.

WHERE TO PUT THE PILE

Select a space in your yard that is easily accessible and has good drainage. Don't place it against a fence. You can buy a ready-made compost bin or build an enclosure for your pile. You should be able to tumble or turn the pile easily to speed decomposition.

COMPOSTING INGREDIENTS

Chop and break the pieces of browns and greens into

smaller pieces before putting them in the pile to help them decompose faster. For a foundation, start with bulky browns such as sticks and wood chips. This will absorb liquid and allow for better air circulation.

Layer browns and greens like lasagna, adding water as you go. As you add browns and greens, add two to three times the amount of browns as greens. Ensure any food scraps are covered by four to eight

inches of browns.

FINISHED COMPOST

Once the compost pile is no longer heating up after mixing and there are no visible food scraps, allow the pile to cure for at least four weeks. The pile should shrink to about a third of its original size. Sift out finished compost — it should be dark, loose and smell like fresh soil — to use in the garden. Put anything that didn't break down back in the pile.

Build a Great Outdoor Kitchen

Outdoor kitchens are moving past the basic grill. This year's outdoor kitchens have pizza ovens, outdoor TVs, smokers, flattop grills and more.

Custom outdoor kitchens can become the heart of outdoor living, becoming a focal point for gatherings big and small. Here are some features to keep in mind if you plan to build an outdoor kitchen this year.

BARS AND SINKS

There are many options for adding a sink to your outdoor kitchen, and they can usually combine with features of a great bar, too. Kitchen sinks for outdoor areas come in variations just like the sink inside, with single or double basins. Their large drains move water quickly, which is ideal for washing up and filling large pots of water. However, they tend to take up some space.

Outdoor bar sinks are smaller with single basins. Some have insulated linings, which help them hold ice to keep drinks cold. They're good for washing hands and prepping food, but they move less water than bigger kitchen sinks.

Outdoor wet bar and sink stations are all-in-one components that are often made of durable 304 stainless steel.



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The sink basin holds ice for drinks, and depending on what you choose, can come with accessories such as bowls for chopped vegetables and bottle holders.

PIZZA OVENS

Outdoor kitchens have gone beyond burgers and steaks. Pizza ovens are a great

addition to an outdoor kitchen, with a rocket-hot high temperature of up to 1,000 degrees to fire up the perfect pie. Choose from wood-fired or gas options that are either built into the countertop or are freestanding for mobility. There are even portable models, but they don't get as hot as the permanent models.

OUTDOOR TVS

No, it's not advisable to put a regular TV outside in the elements. Outdoor-rated TVs can stand up to the elements and provide another focal point for you and your guests. Stay in touch with the big game or turn on your favorite show, fire up the grill and keep entertained all year long.

CABINETRY AND STORAGE

No one regrets more storage. Include plenty of space for storing accessories and more when designing your outdoor kitchen. Also consider cold storage such as a refrigerator for wine, drinks or food. Choose materials rated for outdoor use, even if the kitchen area is covered.

Plant for Pollinators

Pollinators are the insects and animals that help transfer pollen from one plant to another, spreading the species and helping your flowers, fruits and veggies grow.

They help plant populations maintain genetic diversity. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates \$10 billion in crops depend on pollination every year.

Some pollinators you may be able to spot outside are ants, bees, bats, beetles, birds, butterflies, flies, moths, wasps, lizards, geckos and hummingbirds. The USDA gives this advice for planting your garden for pollinators.

Grow a variety. Plant a wide variety of plants that bloom from early spring to late fall. Plant them in clumps rather than in single plants, including plants native to your region. Native plants are adapted to your local climate, soil and native pollinators. Also consider night-blooming plants for moths and bats.

Eliminate pesticides when you can. If you can't, choose the least-toxic pesticide possible. Use the product exactly as the label directs and spray at night when pollinators aren't as active.

Include host plants. Some pollinators rely on plants to host



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their larvae, and a garden full of those can help support healthy pollinator populations. Remember that the larvae will eat these plants and some are less than ornamental. The butterflies are pretty, though, so put in a patch that's just for them.

Provide food and nutrients. Use a drip irrigation system or bird bath to create a damp area and mix salt or wood ashes into the mud. You can provide a hummingbird feeder filled with nectar made from four parts water to one part sugar.

Place something red on the feeder to attract the birds. Butterflies enjoy food such as animal droppings and rotting fruit. Put out slices of overripe bananas and oranges, or a sponge in a dish of lightly salted water.

Provide a home. Put up places for pollinators to live, such as bee and bat houses. Leave dead trees or the occasional dead limb for nesting sites. Bat houses are a good idea (and can keep down the population of harmful insects).