



Hints For Homeowners

Outdoor Kitchens Are What's In: Top Tips For Creating A Better Outdoor Kitchen

(NAPS)—It's quickly becoming the most popular gathering space in the home.

And why not? It can come complete with pizza ovens, keg tappers, wine chillers and more. It can be the epicenter for home entertaining. It can be used to store, prep and serve your favorite dishes.

Of course, "it" is the outdoor kitchen.

According to a survey of residential landscape architects by the American Society of Landscape Architects, 92 percent said outdoor living spaces would be a popular design element in the coming year.

Not only do they add to the quality of life at home, outdoor kitchens can have a return on investment similar to an indoor kitchen remodel.

Outdoor kitchens can range from a grill, some cabinetry and countertop all the way up to something that resembles a backyard sports bar and grill complete with TV, sound system, keg tapper, pizza oven, grill and refrigerators.

With so many options available to homeowners, Russ Faulk, a nationally recognized expert on outdoor kitchen design and vice president of design for Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet, has several tips to keep in mind when thinking about creating an outdoor kitchen, no matter the budget.

A Better Fire

There's one rule that should never be broken when deciding on appliances for the outdoor kitchen, said Faulk. That rule is "never scrimp on the grill," he said.

"A grill drives overall satisfaction with the outdoor kitchen. When choosing a grill, think about the kind of cooking you aspire to, not the kind you do now," Faulk said. "There are no uniform depths, widths or heights, so if you have a grill built into a countertop and you no longer like it, it may be a serious headache to have the grill replaced and the surrounding counter recut to fit it."

While Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet is known for its Hybrid Fire Grill—which allows for cooking with gas, charcoal and wood all in one grill—there are many viable options at various price points. Finding one that will enable your cooking capabilities to grow is key.

Avoid Common Mistakes

Insufficient lighting and counter space are the two most common mistakes Faulk sees in outdoor kitchens. He said these mistakes greatly limit how well the kitchen works. "Without enough lighting around the grill, it's hard to cook at night, especially in the spring or fall when night comes earlier," he said. Faulk recommends placing lighting around or over the grill to see food being cooked, but make sure



With the right appliances, you can do some great grilling and other kinds of cooking in the great outdoors.

the lights' beams are not blocked by the grill hood, causing a shadow to be cast over the cooking surfaces.

"You need space to work, stack and serve," Faulk said of three major tasks that take place on a countertop. Having enough room in the right places is key to creating an outdoor kitchen that will be functional and enjoyable for years to come. Faulk said there should be several "landing areas"—or uninterrupted space—on the countertop where certain tasks can be accomplished.

"A grill should have 24 inches of counter space on one side and 12 inches on the other, so the cook can take food from one platter and put it on the grill," Faulk said. "After the food is done, the cook can take it off the grill and place it on a platter on the other side of the grill." He said sinks should have 18 inches on either side to give enough room to wash food or stack dirty dishes.

Staying Cold and Dry

Not all cabinetry or refrigeration is made the same. Before deciding on a piece of refrigeration, Faulk suggests asking two questions: "Is it rated as food safe?" and "Can it be kept outside all year?"

"Lots of people are surprised to learn about what's available for outdoor refrigeration—drawers, freezers, beverage chillers and even keg tappers," said Faulk. "By asking if the refrigeration is rated food safe, you learn that the unit can hold a set interior temperature even when the thermometer rises above 95 degrees outdoors. Food-safe refrigeration means that poultry and other groceries won't go bad and drinks will stay chilled to the temperature that best suits you."

Faulk also suggests asking if outdoor refrigeration can be left outdoors all year, even during the winter.

"Several manufacturers suggest bringing the appliances indoors during the winter," he said. "They're difficult to remove in the fall and even harder to replace and make level in the spring. It's just easier on home-

owners if they have a unit that can be kept outside all year long."

While some think a cabinet is a cabinet, Faulk said not all are created equal. "Look for cabinetry that has a way of keeping the elements out, full-extension shelves and all its parts made of stainless steel," he said.

To protect from rain and the elements, weather-tight cabinetry is another good investment. There are different ways to keep the inside of a cabinet dry, including magnetic gaskets that create a seal, or rain gutters—which are built into Kalamazoo Outdoor Gourmet's cabinetry—that surround the door and drawer openings to channel water away.

Whether you're adding a grill and counter space to your backyard or building a fully-equipped outdoor kitchen, incorporating design fundamentals is key. It will ensure that your family and friends will have a truly memorable experience—every time, for years to come.

Insider Tips

The smallest details make a big difference in how an outdoor kitchen works. Here are some of Faulk's favorite insider tips that make an outdoor kitchen even better.

On The Edge—A drip edge is a narrow, shallow groove cut into the underside of the countertop. Its purpose is to prevent water from curling under the counter and into cabinets. By cutting a 1/8-inch-deep groove that's just 1/4 of an inch from the counter edge, a barrier is created that interrupts water from making its journey under the counter and into your cabinets.

BTU-tiful Power—To get the best performance out of the gas appliances in an outdoor kitchen, they have to be fed the proper amount of fuel. That means the pipe sending gas to the appliances has to be the right size. Take into account everything that will be using the supply of gas. For example, do you have a pool that will be heated off the same pipe that the grill is using? Likewise, do you have a fire pit that will be fed from that pipe? If that is the case, the contractor needs to take all those factors into account. Then he'll determine the proper size of the gas line to effectively feed enough power to everything.

Pump It—If it's going to cost too much to run a water line to the outdoor kitchen, but you still want a sink and running water to wash veggies and other items, use an RV pump. "I know it seems unorthodox, but I have seen where this has been a really economical and efficient solution to having running water without the expense of running a water line," said Faulk.