

7 Ways to Design an Outdoor Room

Create an outdoor room that invites you to stay. Here are seven design tips the pros know — and now you do, too!



Photo: Roger Wade, Home: [Expedition Log & Timber Homes](#) / See more of this home [here](#).

Article courtesy of [Garden Gate Magazine](#)

Forget expensive decor and fantastic views. The best decks and patios are the ones you actually live on (although a view is nice...). With that in mind, here are seven tips the pros know about creating comfortable, usable outdoor rooms. It's all about choosing and arranging furniture wisely.

1. Bring indoors out

Think of your **patio** as part of the house. If it extends off the **kitchen**, turn it into dining space. If it opens off the living room, make it simple to move a big party outside. You're much more likely to use a space if it's easy to get to and comfortable.

2. Define your rooms

If you have enough room for living and dining space outdoors, you don't need to build a wall and frame a door to make it clear that folks are moving from one to the other. More subtle divisions, such as outdoor area rugs, can help define a space. Or put a couple of large plants in place as a screen or install a **pergola** over part of the deck to mark a change.

3. Keep it flexible

Design your space so you can use it lots of ways: Push the table against the wall to serve a crowd buffet-style. Buy stackable chairs that move out of the way easily. The patio at left is equally suited to a cozy breakfast or a cocktail party. Some of this has to do with what's underfoot. The smoother the surface, the more crowd-friendly it is.

4. Respect traffic

Resist the temptation to place something based only on how it looks there. A container may look fantastic on the steps, but it won't last long if you can't open the door all the way without banging into the pot. And it's just not comfortable to zigzag through a patio full of furniture to get into the backyard. Look at the path of least resistance, and leave corridors that don't make folks veer too far away from it. A 4-ft.-wide path is perfect, but you can get away with less if it isn't a frequently used route.

5. Remember scale

Don't try to put too much or too little in a space. Furniture doesn't have to fill your entire patio. Open areas are just fine. Sometimes all a large area needs is a few tall elements, such as potted plants and pillars, to keep your attention from wandering around an expanse.

6. Save space

Especially in small spaces, look for furniture that multitasks: Benches that double as storage bins, potting tables you can serve drinks from and even ottomans and coffee tables you could sit on. With some paint, an all-weather top and updated handles and pulls, the old microwave

cart in the photo above found new life as a serving station — and it also stores seat cushions between uses.

7. Keep it simple

If you can't leave your furniture out for the winter, make it easy on yourself. Buy lightweight pieces that are easy to haul, and make sure you have somewhere to store them easily. Even just stacking chairs and pushing them together enough that you can get a cover over them is good.
