

ROOM with a view

Turn your backyard inside-out with style and comfort once reserved for the family room

By Becky Neems

The cool of spring has passed by, and now the bright, glowing days and lazy, sultry evenings are beckoning. Summer is here, and what better place to soak up all it offers than your own backyard.

Today's decks and patios are enjoyed for more than simple barbecues - they have become a valued place for relaxing with family, entertaining friends, and unwinding at twilight.

"Everyone wants to make an extra room. Space is everything," said Ellen Agnew of the Great Escape. "It's less just eating dinner and using the grill - more about [how to] sit out, relax, enjoy the yard, and watch the kids play."

More time spent in the outdoor space brings with it the desire for the same luxuries found inside the home. People are transitioning from traditional chairs and tables to more comfortable furniture for their outdoor spaces, such as sofas and mini sectionals, said David Forde of Room and Board Oak Brook.

"Using a patio is now more about group gathering than eating a meal," Forde said. "People are finding ways to spend their time outside as much as possible; taking a nap, gathering with friends, not relying on a table."



*EcoSmart Dish fireplace and Oasis outdoor sofa can be found at Room and Board.

Swingasan chair at left available at Pier 1 Imports

Making the outdoor space as livable as the family room is made simple with seating and accessories that make fashionable, comfortable use of fabrics and materials that are durable in different weather.

Traditional wicker can split in harsh suburban temperatures. Synthetics are the new alternative to maintaining that weaved look while standing up to rain, heat and even snow, Agnew said. Synthetic wicker has a metal frame and is made out of vinyl or high-density polyethylene, so it's durable all summer long.

"Not everyone thinks about it, but your patio is an equally important extension of your home that offers the opportunity to surprise unsuspecting guests with an outdoor oasis," said Aimee Beatty, in-house stylist with Pier 1 Imports.

Bright colors and bold shapes are trending, and that's something to keep in mind when looking to spice up the patio. There are options of bright-colored synthetic wicker as well as weatherproof fabrics on pillows and cushions.

"Vibrant colors and eye-catching patterns can set the tone for summer entertaining,"

Aimee Beatty
Pier 1 Imports

If a cerulean blue sofa or a sunny yellow lanai beg more color commitment than makes you comfortable, there are other ways to add that extra flair. Beatty suggests complementing earth-toned options with pillows and cushions featuring bright colors in mix-matched bold stripes and geometric patterns.

In order to keep fabric vibrant and bright despite the seesaw weather, they can be made of synthetic vinyl or Sunbrella® fabric, which is a material made to last that is also used in umbrellas.

Sunbrella® is a solution-dried acrylic fiber that holds up against mildew, stays waterproof and keeps its color. There is no worry when cleaning it with bleach because it doesn't harm the fabric and the colors stay bright, Forde said.

Synthetic rattan swings are a fun alternative as well with cushions that have UV-protection and mildew resistance. These synthetics and fabrics are made of different forms of plastic, sometimes recycled materials, and can be left outside year-round, Forde said.

While the sun can be fun, nothing says summertime cool like a great patio umbrella.

Cantilever umbrellas are popular because their poles aren't in the way when gazing at the yard, walking around the deck or talking to guests. Similar in shape to a work-desk lamp, their function and style make them a popular choice for

seating arrangements. Agnew said, and they can stand on their own unlike other umbrellas that are likely to fall over in the breeze. They also are available with LED lights, perfect for curling up on the patio couch to read a good book after the sun goes down.

Speaking of sundown, as the heat of summer draws to a close, the backyard fun doesn't have to end. Moveable fire pits bring warmth and style to the outdoor space, and come in different shapes and sizes to create a welcoming ambience.

But if the smoke has you second-guessing, look for fire pits that burn a vegetable-based ecofuel made of bioethanol Forde said. This fuel is biodegradable, and burns clean with no smoke or fumes to compromise a clear summer night .



*Cabana
Geometric Yellow and
Stripe Cobalt pillows
can be found at
Pier 1 Imports.