



## HOMEOWNER'S GUIDE TO OUTDOOR LIVING

# How to Transform Your Yard Into an Outdoor Living Space



NEAL'S  
DESIGN • REMODEL

## ABOUT NEAL'S



In 1972 Neal's Construction Company, Inc. began and has since grown into one of the top 2% of all remodeling contractors in the United States. Neal Hendy's sons, Neal Jr., Steve, and Alan, and Neal's daughter, Leanne, joined the team. Over the years, many design, innovation, and quality awards have been earned from the local and national media, trade associations, and national trade publications. However, the real success at Neal's Design•Remodel has been the people working together to plan and construct our clients' home dreams into reality. Our goal is solving home improvement living needs, within the budgets of our clients, by delivering a superior product through quality service. We never lose sight of the fact that our future in this industry depends on how we "wow" our customers today.

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# FORWARD

There's no place like home and Cincinnati is one of the best places to call home. Today, more people are opting for "staycations" by creating personal backyard retreats. If you want to take full advantage of our beautiful weather and all that our area has to offer, why not vacation at home by creating an outdoor living space for all the activities you enjoy?

A yard with amenities is a delightful haven. The best part is that it's just outside your back door. Add a patio for relaxing, a pool to cool down on a hot day or an outdoor kitchen for entertaining. An outdoor fireplace and hot tub can be a perfect setting for a romantic evening or a place where the family can roast marshmallows and warm up the kids after a swim. A screened porch is an ideal spot to read a book or enjoy a summer's eve with family and friends.

New trends add to the enjoyment of outdoor living. Many indoor appliances have been redesigned for outdoor use. Now you can have a refrigerator, warming oven or television outdoors year-round.

The possibilities are endless. And, we have some great ideas to make your home your favorite vacation destination.

As always, we welcome your questions and comments.

*The Neal's Design • Remodel Team*

# GETTING STARTED

Creating an outdoor living space begins with answering some basic questions about your property, the types of activities you enjoy, the neighborhood and locale, and the architecture of your home.

## Your Yard

As you look around your yard, what do you like and dislike? Are there trees that are picturesque or are they obstacles? Do you have a level yard or is there a slope? How large is the yard? What would be the best way to enjoy your yard – a deck, patio, veranda, porch, enclosed porch, three-season room? Would trees or plantings need to be removed to add a structure or patio? Would a retaining wall be needed or desired?



*Multi-level deck with a woodland view*

## Your Outdoor Activities

An outdoor living space can provide a place to relax, read a good book or can be geared toward an active lifestyle such as swimming, gardening, barbequing, entertaining or outdoor sports. What activities do you enjoy doing outdoors? **Outdoor living projects can be completed in phases.** Identify your priorities to determine where to start and to set a budget.

## The Neighborhood and Locale

It's always important to consider your neighbors when planning an outdoor project. What types of outdoor improvements have they made to their homes? Are homes in the neighborhood spaced close to one another? Will you require some screening for privacy? If you are thinking about adding a pool you will need fencing. What type of fence is compatible with homes in your area?



*Patio, putting green and garden. This backyard retreat began with creating an expansive patio for outdoor dining, entertaining and cooking. A putting green, stone path and rock garden with water features were added later.*

Consider building guidelines if you live in a neighborhood that has a homeowner's association. There also may be town building codes to consider if you're planning to add an outdoor structure or fireplace to your yard.

## Your Home's Architecture

An outdoor living space should look and feel like an extension of your home and blend in with both the exterior and interior. Roofing, siding and trims of an outdoor structure should be compatible with the architecture of the house.

## Create a Wish List

Successful projects begin with a wish list. A wish list should identify the things you NEED and WANT in your outdoor living space. It helps to collect photos of outdoor spaces with elements that you like. Look through magazines such as *Midwest Living* and the outdoor living sections of websites such as [Houzz](#) and [Neal's](#). Having a wish list in hand is especially helpful when talking to a designer or contractor for your project and for setting a budget.

## Talk with a Design Professional

If your plans include adding a deck, porch, three-season room, gazebo, veranda, pool cabana or other structure to your property, a professional designer can help you create a plan to optimize the aesthetic appeal and function. A professional designer will consider how the outdoor living space connects to the house, traffic patterns of users, safety, maintenance and ways to withstand the elements of nature.



*Patio with sheltered seating area and neighboring homes. When homes in a neighborhood are spaced close together, aesthetics are an important consideration. In designing this covered patio to meet the homeowners' needs, the impact on neighboring properties was an essential component in the plan. Projects like this often have to be approved by a homeowners' association which may have written guidelines and specifications for a builder to address.*



*Classic white with detail trim and a green roof on this pavilion match the adjoining home's architectural character.*

There are many new products on the market that make outdoor living spaces more functional and beautiful such as stone surfacing, decking, outdoor kitchen appliances, outdoor lighting, furniture, fireplaces and firepits (wood and gas). A design professional is knowledgeable about these products and how they may work in your setting.

A landscape professional is another resource. Good landscaping involves creating garden areas that are suited to your locale and complement your home. If you have a small space, plantings should be planned so that the garden does not become overgrown in a year or two. If deer are a problem, it's helpful to know which types of flowers and shrubs are deer resistant. Slopes present a challenge and can be enhanced with retaining walls and appropriate plantings.



*An outdoor kitchen with double grill, hood, warming drawer, sink, tile and granite counters is a dream for an avid cook. Working with a professional designer who knows products, their features and installation specifications is one of the best ways to bring your dream to life without experiencing nightmares.*



*Sheltered porch with fountain and gardens that required careful planning to integrate the walkway, entry to the home and water feature with easy to maintain plants. Grasses, shrubs, roses and an assortment of perennials are the foundation for the garden. Annuals and coleuses add color and can be changed from year to year.*

# OUTDOOR ADDITIONS

Outdoor additions are structures physically attached to the home.

## Decks and Railings

New deck products can last decades and add beauty and value to a home. If you're planning to build a deck consider easy maintenance composite decking and take time to look at options for balusters and rails such as iron spindles or glass panels that will maximize the view. In your design, you may want to consider built-in seating and storage by using hinged boxed seats on the deck or enclosed storage below.

## Entryways

The exterior entryway to your home makes a big first impression and adds to the curb appeal of your home. Columns, light fixtures, benches, stairs and walkways, and an inviting front door add both style and function to a home.

## Open Porches and Verandas

Porches are the perennial gathering places during summer days to cool down, read or enjoy a cold drink. Traditionally, a porch provided a space to "sit back and relax."

Long, open porches often with a railing or a columnnade attached to a house are known as verandas and provide ample space for entertaining. The famous [Grand Hotel](#) on Mackinac Island is well-known for its expansive veranda.



*A deck can link a home with natural surroundings such as mature trees and bushes. The spindles of the railing allow you to fully enjoy the view. There is room on the deck for dining and conversation when entertaining guests.*



*A veranda with columns, trim and façade features that blend with the architecture of a home is a relaxing place to entertain family and friends on a summer day. Three ceiling fans circulate air to cool guests who may be enjoying an outdoor meal or gathered for conversation.*



## Screened Porches

A screened porch is a favorite gathering place providing protection from the rain, sun and insects. Today homeowners are finding [new uses for porches](#) by adding an area for dining, a bar or even a kitchen.

## Sunrooms

A sunroom is the brightest spot in a home where you can take full advantage of the sun's warmth well beyond summer. A wall of windows or patio doors bring the outside into a home. Year-round sunrooms have insulated double-pane glass windows and doors, a heating system and insulated walls and ceilings.

## Three-Season Rooms

[Three-season rooms](#) are designed to provide a sheltered space to enjoy an outdoor setting and to bring natural light into a home. They lack central air conditioning and heating. A fan can be added to circulate air to cool the room and a heater can be used to extend its use. Three-season rooms typically have single pane glass windows and may have insulation in the knee walls. The intent is to use the space eight months out of the year.



*This screened porch is integrated with a patio with a built-in bench and outdoor dining table.*



*A traditional three-season room usually requires two feet of walls in the corners for wind bracing. This homeowner wanted as much glass as possible to bring light into a home surrounded by tall trees. A custom designed and engineered sunroom provided the best solution. The windows use Low-E glass with special coatings that reflect heat back inside to warm the room in the winter and reflect solar energy away in the summer, all while minimizing damaging UV rays which cause furnishings to fade. The room is elevated and opens onto a deck.*

# OUTDOOR STRUCTURES



This beautifully constructed **arbor** holds a trumpet vine and has base plantings of Alberta spruce, roses, coreopsis and spikes of gladiolas.

## Arbors

An arbor (or arbour) is a structure in a garden made by growing plants over a frame.



The lovely gardens of this home can be enjoyed from a **patio** that features a pergola.

## Patios

A patio is a flat area of ground usually in the back of a house covered with a hard surface material such as concrete or pavers, usually used for sitting and relaxation.



A guest-oriented **pool house cabana** with shower, changing rooms, kitchenette and storage.

## Cabanas and Pool Houses

A **cabana** is a shelter built on a beach or near a swimming pool. Once used for shade or changing after a swim, a cabana can also be an ideal place for a shower, kitchenette or bar. Add an overhang and you will have shelter from the sun's rays.



A **pavilion** can be an exquisite garden structure. This pavilion was built for entertaining and features a fireplace, outdoor television and seating in the heart of a garden and wooded landscape setting.

## Pavilions

A pavilion is a structure in a garden with open sides. It is usually used for entertaining.



This **gazebo** is the ultimate haven for outdoor living. The beautiful southern ledgestone exterior enhances the gardens and landscape of the home. Its amenities include a ventless gas fireplace, gas firepit in a conversation area, an outdoor television, a fully equipped outdoor kitchen, a granite topped bar with a sink, a dining area and an adjacent patio complete with outdoor seating and a garden dining area. Floor tiles are Porcellana di Rocca.

## Gazebos

A gazebo is a roofed structure used for outdoor entertaining. A **gazebo roof** has a geometric shape such as a hexagon, octagon, square or rectangle as the primary architectural element. Gazebos can be free-standing or attached to a house. They add beauty and charm to any home and garden. The interior can be equipped with bench seating or a table for outdoor dining. A ceiling fan or chandelier can be installed in the peak of the roof. One of our favorite projects that incorporated a gazebo in the design was an **outdoor entertainment retreat** built for Maineville homeowners. The project received a **NARI award**.



This **outdoor living room** features a patio bordered by a retaining wall that doubles as a seating area around a firepit. There is a cooking area, dining and seating in the space, which is edged by garden beds.

## Outdoor Rooms

**Outdoor rooms** are multi-functional living spaces that are an extension of a home. The space is often unified with a garden, pool or pond. An outdoor room usually has defined areas for outdoor cooking and dining. It is furnished with patio furniture, may be sheltered or include a firepit.



Two steps lead up to this stone **terrace** that provides an outdoor dining area for this home. A railing protects the side of the terrace to prevent falls and adds architectural interest.

## Terraces

A terrace is a raised level paved area outside a home.



Another unique project is this **shelter** in the yard of a homeowner who wanted to create a park-like feature. The focal point of the shelter is a stone fireplace. The shelter protects a seating area in front of the fireplace.

## Shelters

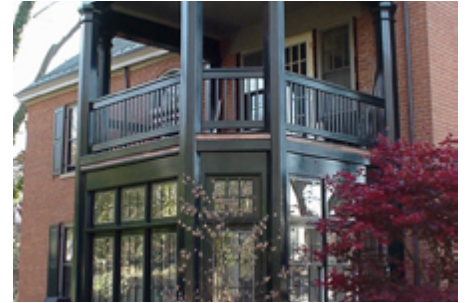
A shelter is an open, free-standing structure used to protect people or things.



The **pergola** on this outdoor room covers a patio and provides an additional semi-shaded area for entertaining.

## Pergolas

A pergola is a structure usually consisting of parallel colonnades supporting an open roof of girders and cross rafters. What distinguishes a pergola from an arbor is that it is used for shade and it is a larger structure.



**Solariums** were often built for health reasons because it was thought the exposure to sun promoted healing. In homes, they provide a place of warmth for reading, growing plants and escaping winter. A porch was built over the solarium of this home to enable residents to enjoy the sun's rays.

## Solariums

A solarium is a room fitted with walls of glass for maximum exposure to sunlight.

# WATER FEATURES

Water features for a yard are diverse and range from pools and hot tubs for relaxation and recreation to waterfalls and fountains that complement gardens. It's important to integrate these features with a home's architecture and landscape as well as the homeowner's lifestyle. Below are some of our projects that demonstrate the importance of design and planning to transform a backyard into an oasis.

## Hardscapes

Good exterior design begins with creating a "hardscape." What is a hardscape? Hardscape refers to the paved areas and structures that surround a building. In landscape design hardscape is the non-plant elements of a yard which include patios, paths, retaining walls, steps, built-in seating areas, outdoor kitchens, driveways and even garden framing and statues. Products used for hardscapes include rock, brick, concrete, stone, asphalt and other hard materials.

## Hot Tubs

If you plan to install a hot tub it's important to be aware of local building guidelines that may specify the location in proximity to the home and requirements for conduits. There also may be guidelines set by a homeowners' association to consider in planning your project. Hot tubs must be installed on a platform that will support the weight of the tub and water. A hot tub will also require a surround.



*To complement the natural setting, a 10,000 lb. boulder was skillfully chiseled into an L-shape and set over the edge of the pool. A large portion of the massive boulder rests below the surface of the reflective water.*



*An illuminated custom hot tub with spillways that flow into the pool provides a relaxing setting at night.*

## Landscaping

Landscaping is an art. Landscape design requires knowledge of construction, science and architecture in addition to an eye for aesthetics. A landscape begins by assessing the locale. Terrain, soil, sun exposure, wind, depth of the frost line and climate will determine the types of plantings that can be used. Drawings that take into account hardscape, structures and indigenous flora such as trees will depict the desired outcomes of your project.

## Pools

New features for pools are amazing and can make a swimming pool meld into a landscape, as though it had been part of the natural surroundings. Some of these features include beach entry pools where the depth starts at zero and gradually increases as you enter, waterfalls, spillways and fountains installed in the pool.

## Waterfalls

Backyard waterfalls can be built in a garden and require three things: a slope, a pond for the water to flow to and a pump. A slope can be created with rocks. Pool liners are available in a variety of sizes and pumps are sized for the pond and the amount of water it holds.



*A waterfall was constructed in this garden by grading to create an island and building a slope of rocks. There are three cascades of falls in the garden. When this photo was taken, the plantings were still becoming established. Once the landscape matures the island will look like a natural spring.*



*A perimeter garden of grasses, shrubs, Russian sage and annuals provides color and privacy to this hot tub and pool.*



*Backyard paradise with beach entry pool, hot tub, patio and lush gardens.*

# COOKING & ENTERTAINING

People who love to cook appreciate a functional kitchen whether it's inside or outdoors. If you do a lot of summer entertaining at home or just enjoy cooking summer family meals on a gas or charcoal grill, check out some of the “bells and whistles” in the outdoor kitchens shown on the next page.

## Fundamentals of an Outdoor Kitchen

Creating an outdoor kitchen begins with assessing your space and selecting outdoor appliances. Also determine if you will need plumbing or electrical outlets and lighting for the space. From there, your outdoor kitchen layout can be designed.

Think about how you like to work in a kitchen. How much food prep space do you need? Would you want your kitchen to include seating for family and friends and for conversation when you work? How would you want to manage clean up? How much storage will you need outdoors or would you prefer to do all the prep work indoors and use the grill area strictly for cooking?

## Appliances

Grills today have many options and accessories. One of the latest innovations is a combination grill that uses gas, charcoal and wood for cooking. If you are planning a sheltered outdoor kitchen and will be using a large grill, you may need a ventilation hood to draw off smoke.

Outdoor refrigerators are also earning the attention of homeowners. Most of these are undercounter units that can be protected from the elements and are large enough to store beverages. You will also find freezers and icemakers rated for outdoor use.

One of the hottest trends in outdoor kitchens is an [outdoor pizza oven](#). There is nothing tastier than a pizza grilled at home in a wood-fired oven.

Dishwashers are making their way outdoors. New designs are made to withstand the elements.

Sinks are great to have in a sheltered outdoor kitchen for preparing drinks and for a quick clean up.



*An open outdoor kitchen with a stainless steel grill, storage cabinet and a refrigerator built on a patio. There is a granite counter for food prep and for placing platters of cooked food.*



*This kitchen was designed for a gourmet chef and serving a crowd and features Viking appliances. It has a gas and a wood burning/charcoal grill, a ventilation hood, a warming drawer, an ice maker, a food storage pantry, granite counters, two stainless steel Elkay sinks, a bar that seats six and ceramic tile flooring.*



*A gazebo addition was built for this home. Due to the shape of the room, appliances are set up on separate walls and include a refrigerator, a sink and a grill and ventilation hood shown in the photo.*



*A combination grill was set into a retaining wall that surrounds this patio. There is a counter with an overhang for setting down dishes and a section that forms a bar.*



*An outdoor kitchen was included in a porch addition to this home. It includes a stainless steel combination grill, ventilation hood, storage cabinet and beverage refrigerator.*

## Lighting

Lighting is an essential element in outdoor living spaces and should be planned in the design. Outdoor lights are more subdued than the general lighting of interior rooms but some of the same principles apply. Use spotlights and flood lights for general lighting; lamp-posts, uplights and exterior wall sconces for accent lighting; and low voltage garden lights for ambient lighting.

## Media Equipment

If your plans include adding a flat screen television or sound equipment to your outdoor living area, look for products designed for the outdoors. Outdoor televisions are growing in popularity and there are important differences between indoor and outdoor TVs. The first is safety. Indoor televisions can cause an electrical shock if the unit is exposed to moisture. Second is the quality of the viewing screen in sunlight. An indoor TV will be diffused. Third is corrosion, when exposed to moist air. Manufacturers of televisions designed for outdoor use have addressed these issues. Outdoor TVs can be covered when not in use.

## Putting Greens

To create a backyard putting green you need to consider location, grading, soil and turf. Golfers can create a low maintenance green by using synthetic turf. A green should also include drainage and a sprinkler system if needed.



*Flood lights installed on this home provide general lighting for the garden and dining area. Sconces illuminate the entryways and uplights accent trees and bushes. The pool has lights that provide ambient lighting in the waters. There is also a lamp-post on the patio.*



*This television designed for outdoor use is protected in this open sided gazebo. The exterior is designed to resist moisture, cold temperatures, snow or salt air. The fireplace is a Lennox ventless gas fireplace. Walls are southern ledgerstone.*



*A putting green can be designed according to your specifications to help you improve your game. This putting green includes four cups, an area of ruff, and a stone path border.*



# FIREPLACES & FIREPITS

In the Greater Cincinnati Area, there is a growing demand for outdoor fireplaces and firepits, both wood-burning and natural gas. People want to spend more time outdoors relaxing and entertaining family and friends. Having a source of heat extends the time spent outdoors.

There are many design options for incorporating a fireplace or firepit into an [outdoor living space](#). A well-planned design will address the setting of the home, the architectural style of the house, the needs of the users, available fuel sources, materials used for the façade, and building guidelines that may be applicable.

If you are planning to add an outdoor fireplace or firepit to your home here are some design ideas from projects we've completed for local homeowners:

## Fireplaces



*Wood-burning stone fireplace built into a veranda.*

A stone fireplace takes center stage in this outdoor veranda addition to the home. The fireplace includes wood storage space, a mantel that matches the trim, a glass door screen and a deep elevated hearth for additional seating.



*Ledgestone fireplace with wood mantel and raised hearth.*

This fireplace brings the inside outdoors. Features include a Lennox ventless gas fireplace insert and mesh curtain screen. Walls are southern ledgestone.



*Stone fireplace in a poolside shelter.*

A stone fireplace is the focal point of a multi-function free-standing outdoor shelter with areas for seating, television viewing, an outdoor kitchen and enjoying views of the pool and gardens. The fireplace includes a gas insert and glass door screen. There is a granite hearth and mantel.



*Stone fireplace in a gazebo.*

This gas fireplace was built to fit the curved and tall structure of the gazebo. The mantel matches the cabinetry and a television was placed above it. An ornate wrought iron screen was selected to intensify the impact of the fireplace in the space. The hearth is curved to complement the architecture and stonework extends to the ceiling.



*Free-standing outdoor shelter in a woodland garden with stone and brick fireplace.*

The stone and brick exterior of this wood-burning fireplace blends with the natural surroundings. Brick accents the arched opening and built-in storage compartments for wood. There is an outdoor television placed above the stone mantel. A black iron fireplace screen shields the embers. The hearth provides a place for tools, candles and plants.



*Fireplace on an open porch.*

The lines of this outdoor gas fireplace are simple and the stonework matches the beauty of the home. There is no mantel and a cabinet with folding doors protects the outdoor television when not in use.

## Firepits



*Ledgestone gas firepit.*

A sheltered outdoor sitting area is warmed by a gas firepit. The veranda was built with southern ledgestone. The floor tiles are Porcellana di Rocca.



*Stone firepit on a patio.*

A stone firepit with a low walled seating area provides a gathering place on a patio. The stonework of the firepit matches the wall.



*Poolside firepit.*

This wood burning firepit was placed to warm swimmers exiting the pool and those sitting in a shelter patio. Note the built-in wood box to the right.



*Firepit in a garden setting.*

This wood-burning firepit blends beautifully with the rock garden of a French-country style home. What a wonderful way to enjoy the outdoors in any season.

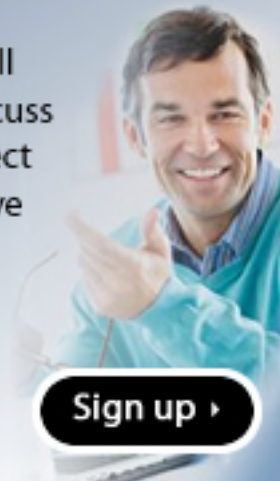
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## Sign-up for Complimentary Initial Consultation

Now that you've got a better idea of what you might want in your kitchen remodel, it's the perfect time to contact us! One of our project consultants will visit your home to discuss your remodeling project with you. They will give you an overview of Neal's, answer your questions, and listen to your ideas.



**Sign up** ▶

## Mark Your Calendar for a Free Design Seminar at Neal's Showroom

Still not sure about your kitchen remodel? Every month, Neal's Design hosts free seminars at our 5,500 sq. ft. showroom about home remodeling. Our team discusses many of the ways you can get the kitchen and bath of your dreams and stay on budget. While at the showroom, we'd be happy to discuss your project further!

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**Sign up today** ▶

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