

Make the most of a backyard patio

By Michael J. Solender

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Increase your home’s living space by expanding outdoors. Savvy outdoor makeover tips place an entire new outdoor “family room” well within reach of even a modest budget.

Turning the backyard into an extension of your home doesn’t have to mean expansive building projects or a five-figure deck addition.

Savvy suburbanites and urban dwellers alike are creating outdoor living areas that complement gentle breezes and mild temperatures by adding accent touches such as fountains, fire pits, shade umbrellas, colorful pots and plantings that take full advantage of cozy outdoor space.

Here are eight projects, none more than \$850, that will have your standard 10-by-10-foot cement patio looking like a million bucks in one or two weekend’s time.

Shade

Perhaps the most desirable element for any backyard patio is shade. Unfortunately, it’s the one component that can often be a budget buster.

One cost-friendly solution is Garden Treasure’s extra-large 10-foot round standing umbrella with a hand-crank opener and a rust-resistant, aluminum rib frame. This umbrella casts a wide shadow and is vented to resist strong winds. The Olefin synthetic fabric is resistant to sun rot, mold and moisture. Retail for \$278 at Lowe’s, <http://low.es/ZR3x5K>.

Pergolas add structure and may offer shade if positioned correctly or fitted with fabric shades or a flowering vine such as Carolina jasmine, says Darin Brockelbank, a local hardscape designer and owner of Metro Greenscape. “Custom built pergolas will run about \$30 per linear foot for cedar,” he says.

- Plans and advice worth paying for

“Don’t be afraid to consult and pay an expert for ideas and plans, even if you plan to do the work yourself,” says Darin Brockelbank, whose firm, Metro Greenscape, does dozens of local hardscape projects from \$5,000 to \$150,000 annually. “The advice you get from pros is well worth the consultation price and can save you the headache of lining up suppliers and obtaining the proper equipment. Legitimate vendors will be happy to collaborate with homeowners on design ideas, installation and material sourcing.”

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A less costly alternative is a prefabricated 7.6-by-10-by-10-foot freestanding pergola. This heavy-duty steel frame structure comes fitted with UV protected sling fabric to offer full shade and comfort. Retail for \$588 at Lowe's, <http://low.es/Zy3ta6>.

Color

Concrete stain is a great way to jazz up a drab cement patio.

A quick wash and dry of your existing pad, two coats of stain from a garden sprayer, and for less than \$75 your cement pad will have an entirely new look. Many natural earth and desert tones are available, or you can go bright and vibrant – the choice is completely up to you as the color palate of stains available is large and varied.

Combination stain and sealer start at about \$30 per gallon retail, and garden sprayers cost about \$30. Available at all home improvement stores: Home Depot, <http://thd.co/10qePIE>; Lowe's; Black Hawk Hardware and many others.

Accent touches like large planters offer a dramatic effect on a small patio and can provide both site line framing and flair. Most garden and home improvement stores offer large (25 gallon or greater) ceramic pots. Pick matching pots with dramatic colors/textures or go for neutral earth tones. Be sure pots have drain holes, then fill them half way with gravel for drainage. Then, layer in soil, trailing vines for the edge such as sweet potato or vinca vine, and tall sweeping grass, such as sawgrass or pampas grass, in the center for a windswept effect. A \$500 budget for pots and plantings should be plentiful. Rountree Plantation Nursery, <http://bit.ly/18aJ4uC>; Pike Nurseries.

Water

No pool? No problem!

A bubbling fountain creates soothing white noise, attracts birds and creates the illusion of a natural water source right in your back "40."

Blue Max Materials offers custom "bubbling rock" fountain components that contain natural stone or stone groupings that are pre-drilled, an AquaBasin reservoir to hold a supply of water and a pump for circulation. Depending on size and grouping, \$700 will buy a substantial starter package. <http://bit.ly/15XBbJP>.

Frontgate's Angel Wall Fountain brings the sound of running water to your yard with water flowing from the elegant angel's mouth into a decorative basin. The 13-by-7-by-23-inch fountain is easy to install and clean. Retail for \$399. <http://bit.ly/157GdUD>.

Fire

Masonry manufacturer and supplier General Shale offers do-it-yourself FPL-100 stone fireplace kits with sitting walls that can be a focal point for most backyards.

The stone is actually weathered concrete block and lined with fire brick. Detailed installation guides, all materials and even a video come with the kit. It's typically a weekend or two project, according to Scott Clark, a district manager with General Shale. Retail for \$849, plus \$149 per 3 feet of sitting wall. <http://bit.ly/ZUfo1w>.

Fire pits that double as s'more stations are popular for extending summertime warmth right up through the chilliest fall evenings. Local family-owned supplier Johnson Concrete offers both square and round fire-pit kits that range from \$320 to \$389.99, with six color options. "These can be installed easily within a couple hours," said sales rep Ricky Jones. www.johnsoncmu.com.



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