



WEEKEND WARRIOR

# Design a Stunning Outdoor Space Like a Pro

by AIMEE L. COOK

**C**reating a stunning outdoor living space doesn't have to mean a weeks-long construction project or a sky-high landscaping budget. With a clear plan and a little research, anyone can turn a basic backyard into a beautiful, designer-worthy retreat in just one weekend.

Whether you want to host lively gatherings or just carve out a quiet spot to decompress after a long week, the secret is breaking it all down into manageable steps. Spread the work across a Friday-through-Sunday schedule and a high-end outdoor oasis feels not just doable but fun.

## FRIDAY

### PLANNING AND VISION

Every great design starts with a plan. Use Friday to dream up your ideal outdoor retreat and map out what you'll need to make it happen. Before you buy a single plant or piece of furniture, spend some time just observing the space and sketching out a strategy.

### MEASURE AND MAP THE SPACE

Grab a tape measure and sketch a rough outline of your yard or patio. Pay attention to how the home's architecture connects with the outdoor space, and track where the sun falls throughout the day and into the evening. It sounds simple, but knowing your light patterns makes a huge difference when you're deciding where to put a cooking area, a shaded seating nook, or a garden bed.

### DEFINE THE DESIGN AESTHETIC

A designer yard rarely features one massive, undefined area. Instead, it introduces dedicated spaces for lounging, dining, and entertaining. Think about how family and friends will actually use the space. Will there be a large fire table for chilly mountain evenings? A dedicated dining setup for summer barbecues?

"First thing to consider is what the finishes are on your outside area," recommends Jo Ann Howa, owner of Natural Instincts. "Whether you have an outdoor kitchen or barbecue island, most of the time these areas are covered. You'll also need to consider the elements. Most homes will have the same type of brick or flooring in those areas."

Once the main features are mapped out on paper, decide on a cohesive color palette and design style. Whether aiming for a sleek, modern look with neutral tones or a vibrant, bohemian retreat, maintaining a consistent aesthetic is the hallmark of professional design.



RIGHT: The stainless steel outdoor kitchen includes a barbecue, refrigerator, and cooktop burner. The TV is protected from the elements to be enjoyed year round.

## SATURDAY

### PLANTING FOR PRIVACY AND BEAUTY

Saturday is for getting your hands dirty and bringing Friday's plan off the page. Head to the local nursery, load up on fresh greenery, and start planting. The right plants can completely transform a space by softening hard edges, adding color, and making everything feel alive.

### ESTABLISHING NATURAL BOUNDARIES

Privacy is a common concern for outdoor living, especially in close-knit neighborhoods with shared sightlines. Instead of relying solely on fencing, use plants to create a lush, natural barrier. Strategic planting of hearty evergreens for example, not only blocks out unwanted views but also dampens neighborhood street noise and creates an intimate, enclosed feeling.

Select fast-growing trees, tall ornamental grasses, and dense shrubs that grow into living screens. This approach provides a beautiful backdrop for weekend gatherings while maintaining a sense of secluded tranquility. Sophy Kohler, owner of Park City Gardens, recommends paying attention to the calendar and planning blooms accordingly.

"When you're planning an outdoor space, you want to think about blooms in every part of the season and capturing some fall color as well," Kohler explains. "When planting trees, choose a variety like a non-fruiting crabapple that will deliver a gorgeous flower early in the spring. Also, a maple tree is considered an ornamental tree; you will get beautiful fall colors from it."



### PERFECTING PATIO POTS

Not every outdoor space features sprawling lawns or expansive garden beds. For patios, decks, and smaller courtyards, container gardening is a brilliant and stylish solution. Potted plants add varying heights, textures, and rich colors, creating visual interest exactly where it is needed most.

Group pots in odd numbers—threes or fives—for a naturally pleasing arrangement. Mix container sizes and styles while keeping the plant colors complementary to the overall design scheme. Place trailing vines in tall planters and mix them with broad-leafed hostas or colorful annuals for a dynamic, eye-catching focal point.

"Pots are so great, especially here in Park City, where digging a hole in the ground can be challenging," Kohler adds. "I love to do a mix of annuals, perennials, and herbs in my pots to make them look more garden-like and wild."

Spend the afternoon planting, watering, and positioning these new green additions throughout the chosen gathering and relaxation spots.

## SUNDAY

### FINAL SETUP AND STYLING

Saturday's planting has set the scene, so Sunday is when everything clicks into place: the furniture, the lighting, the finishing touches that turn a nice yard into a place people actually want to hang out in.

### SET UP THE OUTDOOR KITCHEN

An outdoor kitchen typically becomes the center of everything. Whether you're going all-in with a full grilling station or keeping it simple with a sleek portable setup, carve out a dedicated spot for food prep and serving based on your Friday floor plan.

Incorporate weather-resistant counters for chopping vegetables, a mini fridge for chilled local beverages, and stylish storage cabinets for grilling tools. This purposeful culinary addition keeps the party outside, allowing the host to mingle while guests gather around to chat and sample the day's delicious creations.



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#### **SEATING WITH FIRE TABLES AND OPTIONS FOR ALL**

Now it is time to build the heart of the open-air living room: the seating arrangements. Place cozy groupings of comfortable seating around a stunning fire table. Fire tables set a welcoming, warm tone and immediately become a favorite gathering spot—perfect for roasting s’mores, sharing stories, or sipping wine as the sun sets.

Provide a mix of seating options to

accommodate everyone. Incorporate relaxing rocking chairs for those who love a gentle sway alongside supportive, regular chairs for dining and conversing.

“Depending on where your seating is situated and whether or not it’s covered, you could add an outdoor rug that defines the space and makes it look more like a living room,” Howa suggests. “Often, people have an actual fireplace outside, allowing for a typical seating arrangement in front of it.”

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### **CREATE A WELCOMING GLOW WITH LIGHTING**

Don't let all that hard work vanish the moment the sun goes down. Good lighting keeps the space alive after dark. Skip the single harsh floodlight and go for layered lighting instead.

Howa recommends bordering the pathways with low-voltage lighting to guide guests safely through the yard while adding a whimsical glow. On the exterior walls, mount stylish light sconces near the outdoor kitchen and lounge areas. These sconces provide an elegant architectural accent and keep the space bright and functional well after sunset.

### **STYLING WITH STONE ACCENT TABLES AND TEXTILES**

Finish the Sunday styling with beautiful textures and functional pieces. Place sturdy stone accent tables near the seating arrangements. These solid stone pieces add a natural texture while keeping drinks, snacks, or a decorative potted plant within easy reach.

Toss plush, weather-resistant throw pillows and cozy blankets over the rockers and regular chairs to introduce pops of the chosen color palette.

### **ENJOY THE NEW RETREAT**

By Sunday evening, the transformation is complete. What started as a blank slate on Friday night is now a functional, beautifully designed outdoor living space that's ready for everything from quiet mornings with coffee to full-blown weekend gatherings.

