



Entertaining IN THE GARDEN

Sandra Batley gives us some tips on how to get the most out of garden entertaining this summer

THE SUN IS SHINING, THE GARDEN IS LOOKING LOVELY – what better place to enjoy a nice meal with friends and family. One of the most enjoyable things to do in summer is to be out in the garden entertaining, whether it's a casual BBQ, or a more formal dinner party.

A growing trend overseas is the demand for outdoor entertainment areas. Landscape design-build professionals are integrating audio-visual technology, lighting and climate control systems into outdoor patios, gazebos, kitchens and lounge areas.

A fresh, fun approach to outdoor entertaining is to set up a table out on the lawn amid the greenery to create a relaxing informal gathering place. Set the table near your vegetable or herb garden so guests can pick their own fresh lettuce and herbs for the salad and fresh flowers for the table. Some of the most memorable dinner parties I have had were where I joined a couple of long tables together, threw on a classic white table cloth and dined happily under the night sky by candle light. Another great idea is to grow scented plants such as Burkwood Daphne, Wisteria, Clematis, Frangipani, Gardenia and Star Jasmine close to the entertainment area. They will fill the air with a wonderful perfume, adding to the alfresco experience.

Gardens are not just about plants and flowers. Why not create an edible garden that has plants growing which you can harvest throughout the year ...such as vegetables, fruit, berries and nuts. When the weather really heats up and summer vegetables begin to ripen in abundance, fire up the BBQ and grill tomatoes, eggplant, peppers and onions along side a juicy lean steak. Make a healthy salad from mesclun and rocket grown easily in tubs and raised plots; add those homegrown strawberries to the Pimms, and Voila!



DESIGN TIPS

IF YOU ARE PLANNING TO DESIGN AN OUTDOOR ENTERTAINMENT AREA HERE ARE SOME SIMPLE DESIGN TIPS.

INDOOR-OUTDOOR FLOW

Create a seamless indoor-outdoor transition by locating the entertainment area directly off or close to your main living or kitchen area. This allows for easy flow and transport of food and guests. This space should be large enough to accommodate an average sized table with four chairs, anything less and you could run the risk of not being able to pull your chair out and freely move around. Keep outdoor furniture at an appropriate size for its space. Avoid bulky furniture as this can make the space appear smaller. Built in bench seating is the best way to deal with tight areas. If you require privacy from neighbors, use quick-screening evergreens on the boundary or create a stylish walled courtyard space.



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LIGHTING

Lighting plays an important role when you entertain outside at night. A few carefully placed fixtures can transform a day time outdoor dining and entertaining area into a magical, inviting extension of the home after dusk. Water features, plants and garden sculpture provide great opportunities to produce stunning lighting effects.



HIDDEN SANCTUARY

Create a private secluded spot a small journey away from the house. Build a small gazebo, freestanding pergola, or semi-covered area amongst the garden. Situate a spa, hammock or loungers for a quiet place to socialize in. Surround the area with lush, tropical plants and use lighting to create fantastic nighttime effects.



AKITA TEXTILES BY JAMES DUNLOP

PROTECTION FROM THE ELEMENTS

You will need to think about some form of overhead protection from the sun and rain. The cheapest and simplest idea is to use sun umbrellas, which come in all shapes and sizes. You can also look at shade sails and awnings that are attached to the house. A more costly, permanent option is a pergola either attached or free standing out in the garden. Pergolas that attach to the house require a resource and building consent, along with construction drawings to be submitted into council. They also can be designed with a number of different materials that suit the architecture of the house and the style of the garden.



WHATEVER YOUR BUDGET OR LIFESTYLE, MAKE THE MOST OF SUMMER AND GET YOUR GARDEN INTO SHAPE FOR SOME SERIOUS OUTDOOR ENTERTAINING.



HEATING

If you are planning to entertain outdoors at night, you unfortunately may need to think about keeping warm, as we're not really tropical enough to be dining alfresco. Patio gas heaters are a great solution. They provide warmth efficiently and quickly and are handy for small gatherings if space is limited. They are ideal for courtyards, decks and patio's. Patio heaters give you the flexibility to create warmth where you want it.

There is nothing cozier than the warmth from a fire. Outdoor fireplaces are becoming a popular choice for heating as well as for cooking. Still deemed a luxury item, their heat is derived from either gas or wood. There are some constraints with putting in an outdoor fireplace. Check with your local council with what the regulations are. Also, it is important to site the fireplace out of the path of prevailing winds and nosey neighbours.



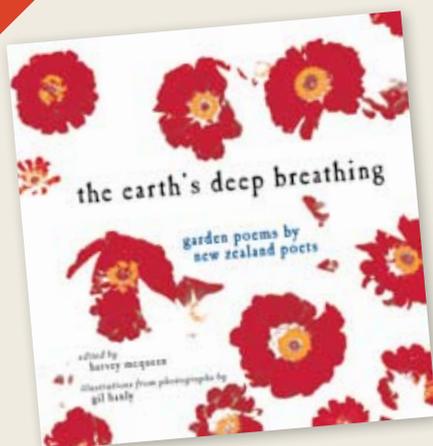
COOKING

The ultimate gardener's accessory is the barbecue. Big or small, it is a classic Kiwi summer-time tradition, I do not know of anyone who does not have one sitting on the deck or patio outside. Barbecues are a fun, relaxed social method of cooking meals and spending time outdoors. Keep your ingredients simple and fresh, and make sure you plan and prepare.



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Random House
NZ; RRP \$34.99

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