

alfresco living

Entertaining outdoors has become part of the New Zealand lifestyle

Words: Sandra Batley





Entertaining outdoors with family and friends is one of the most rewarding functions of a kiwi garden. Gone are the days when backyards were just a place to grow plants and hang the washing. Today, backyards have become outdoor rooms in their own right, fully equipped with everything from cooking facilities, furniture and audio-visual technology. These luxuries, once relegated to the indoors, have changed the face of New Zealand backyards and have turned the humble garden into the perfect place for your next alfresco affair.

Alfresco cooking & dining

A popular pastime during the summer months is dining outdoors. Whether it's an impromptu get-together or a formal dinner, it's important to have an area dedicated to dining that is both easily accessible to the house and large enough to accommodate your seating and cooking requirements.

Furniture for the dining area should include a table and chair that is designed for use outdoors. The space you have available will determine the size of the furniture. Remember, you will need room to walk around the table so choose furniture that is proportionate to the size you have. It's a good idea to position the dining furniture as close as possible to the cooking facilities so as to make preparing and serving meals easy.

The dining area will also need to be protected from the elements so that it can be enjoyed no matter what the weather brings. Pergolas, sun umbrellas, awnings and shade sails are just a few of the options you may want to consider.

When it comes to cooking, the modest kiwi barbecue has always been a quick and convenient way to get a few steaks and sausages ready. However, for those who want to enjoy the complete kitchen experience outdoors, there is now a range of outdoor kitchens to suit every style and budget.

Taking the outdoors to a whole new level, outdoor kitchens extend your internal living space and are the perfect way to bring what has traditionally been an indoor activity outside.

When it comes to outdoor kitchens, you're spoiled for choice. Your alfresco dining experience can be as simple or lavish as you like. From basic modular systems to state-of-the-art kitchens complete with washing-up facilities and storage space, there is bound to be an option to suit you and your outdoor area.

If space permits, consider incorporating a complete outdoor kitchen. With everything outside, it means you won't have to go back and forth inside the house to prepare meals.

If your outdoor dining area cannot →

1. Dine outdoors in style. This dining setting shows how easy it is to use a simple palette of colours and materials to create a stylish and comfortable outdoor space. Photos courtesy of Poynters.

outdoor entertaining

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accommodate a complete kitchen, you can consider a humble barbecue or wood-fired pizza oven. These can be easily incorporated into your outdoor living area without taking up too much space. And the warmth they provide is an added bonus on those cold winter nights.

Outdoor furniture

Seating for the outdoors not only needs to be functional, practical and comfortable, it also needs to be durable and stylish. Outdoor furniture needs to be built tough to withstand the elements 365 days of the year. Furniture for coastal settings especially needs to be designed to avoid corrosion.

There was a time when manufacturers and furniture designers were limited to just a few materials to work with, such as timber and wrought-iron. Today, however, technology has brought with it an array of materials, styles and designs to choose from including concrete, woven wicker, anodised aluminium, stainless-steel and fibreglass. There is also an exciting new range of weather-proof woven furniture for the outdoors, available in a variety of stylish colours to complement any outdoor setting.

When choosing the right style of furniture for the outdoors, the same rules apply as for inside the home, but with a few added conditions. The furniture pieces need to complement the surrounding garden style. For example, if you have a contemporary courtyard you should opt for pieces which are modern in design and which use materials appropriate to the contemporary style.

For a more casual coastal setting, try padded timber deck chairs or a comfy beanbag. And for the more formal, classic outdoor setting, hot-dipped galvanised hand-forged steel delivers a timeless elegance.

Teak or kwila furniture settings are good in combination with native or sub-tropical-style gardens. Their natural good looks blend with the leafy lush foliage and the furniture develops a

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soft silver/grey weathered look over time. Timbers from a sustainable resource are also available for the eco-conscious.

When it comes to outdoor furniture, in addition to tables and chairs there are also sofas, sun loungers, armchairs, hammocks, beanbags and even footstools available. So no matter what your outdoor setting, there is a range of options to choose from when it comes to getting comfortable outdoors.

Outdoor entertainment

Just when you thought it couldn't get any better, manufacturers are now producing a range of outdoor weatherproof televisions for those who want to enjoy the complete home theatre experience outdoors.

Featuring dust and waterproof LCD screens with a protective glass front panel, the TVs are made in lightweight aluminium frames to withstand harsh environments, making them perfect for backyards. And with outdoor televisions there is no compromise with picture quality. You can watch your favourite sports or movies in high definition (HD), with the same 1080P resolution found in indoor televisions. And for those who want to experience the

full cinematic experience outside, there is a range of projectors and projection screens designed for outdoor use. What better way to watch your favourite movie than on the big screen, under the stars, in the comfort of your own backyard?

When it comes to sound, there is a range of options available. Stereo speakers that can be easily mounted under the house eaves, inside planters or attached to posts in the backyard or pool area. Made of plastic moulding or heavy-duty aluminium, they are built to withstand the elements and are durable enough to weather extreme temperatures.

Some speakers are even designed to look like rocks so they blend in seamlessly with your outdoor area. These speakers are ideal for gardens that have lush plantings and groups of natural rock.

Entertaining outdoors is about having fun. With so many options available, from outdoor cooking facilities to furniture and entertainment systems, bringing the indoors out has never been easier. And with so many exciting products and accessories on the market, creating the perfect entertaining area means you'll be able to enjoy the outdoors all year round. ■

2. Boston Acoustics Soundware speakers provide for great outdoor sound. Made from water-resistant materials, the speakers are sturdy enough to withstand the elements. Visit: www.easternhifi.co.nz

3. The Rinnai CrossRay BBQ is designed for the entertainer. It uses an innovative method of radiant infra-red plates for cooking. Visit: www.rinnai.com

4. A barbecue with a difference! The Rinnai Maxim X7SS comes with additional features such as a hotplate and sink. Visit: www.rinnai.co.nz

5. This compact, all-in-one hard-wearing stainless-steel cabinet includes useful bench space to prepare food, and sliding cupboards and drawers for storage. Visit: www.braycostainless.co.nz

6. These luxurious textured rattan lounges will get you comfortable outside in no time. The dark chocolate colour complements the natural surroundings beautifully. Photo courtesy of Coast Design Co.