

Outdoor Fireplaces – A Great Way to Celebrate Nature!

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Outdoor fireplaces are becoming commonplace in America's backyards. As people spend more time outdoors, they create a healthy outdoor "living room" environment. Whether used for family gatherings or entertaining friends and business associates, the outdoor fireplace is quickly becoming the most important focal point of the outdoor living environment.



Photo courtesy of Condar Co.

Outdoor Fireplace Choices

There's an outdoor fireplace for every budget. They can be as basic as a metal portable fireplace on wheels to an elaborate fireplace that's built into an outdoor living room.

Basic portable fireplaces are being enjoyed by many. They are an ideal choice when you are renting a home, have a small yard, are on a budget, or just want to experience a fireplace before putting more money into a permanent one. When using this type of fireplace they should be located on a noncombustible surface. Never set one of these units directly on wood or other combustible materials such as a deck. Never, ever use one of these units in a garage or near flammable liquids such as gas.

Some outdoor fireplaces can be incorporated into a barbeque station with a sink, refrigerator and gas grill. These are usually gas fireplaces. More elaborate outdoor fireplace units may have carved stone, elaborate tile, waterfalls and ambient lighting.

Fuel Choices

When people think "outdoor fireplace" they usually think of anything from a woodburning fire pit to a woodburning fireplace. While wood is the most common fuel, some locations may prohibit open fires or woodburning because of fire dangers, flying sparks, or emissions. Many gas fireplaces are being installed.

Almost all outdoor gas fireplaces incorporate a stainless steel weather resistant firebox and stainless controls. And yes, they have options like remote controls and flame height adjustability. Keep in mind that gas fireplaces should not be used to cook foods. Juices from meats, burnt marshmallows and other "debris" can stain the logs and gunk up the controls making it a potentially unsafe fireplace.

Another choice is artificial logs. They will burn for some time and are usually spark free. Check the label on the log before using for cooking to make sure it is food safe.

Fireplace Location

The location options for your fireplace are limited by your home, local codes and landscaping. Consider the usual direction of prevailing winds and try to locate the fireplace so smoke and flue gasses will usually blow away from

your house. Make sure you check local codes to see if there are any requirements in locating a fireplace within a certain distance from your house, other structures or a neighboring home.

Fireplaces located right under trees can kill the tree and sparks could ignite the tree. While all outdoor fireplaces should have a spark screen in place, it's still possible for a spark to escape.

Other basic location choices are whether a fireplace is located on an exterior wall of a home, is separate from the home, or actually a see-through fireplace that can be viewed from outside or inside. Consider not only codes, but the advice of your insurance company when making your decision.

Finishing Touches

To bring your fireplace together with your home and landscaping, consider the natural elements available. A field stone fireplace could be constructed of locally available stones. If your existing chimney is made of cut stone, you may be able to match the stone for your fireplace. If your home is painted, perhaps you might want to enhance the fireplace facing with decorative tiles. If the fireplace is to be included in an outdoor living room, consider the types of furnishing, architectural elements of the home, color schemes and current landscaping to tie it altogether.

Plan your outdoor living room appropriately before spending your first dime. The most successful projects are ones where plenty of thought and preparation are spent initially before the purchase is made. Use locally available materials for construction and or accenting with finishing touches. Use your outdoor living room for healthy entertaining and gatherings and enjoy your investment.