

Homes

Outdoor entertaining spaces made great

‘The backyard isn’t an afterthought anymore’

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Looking to spend time with friends and family in your backyard? You’re not alone. “Summer weather in Canada doesn’t stick around long, so when it shows up, we make the absolute most of it,” says Pashv Shah, general manager, Canada of Taskrabbit.

“Our data shows outdoor furniture searches are up 65 per cent year-over-year and deck searches are up 46 per cent, so Canadians are clearly investing in spaces built for lounging and dining outside. We’re also seeing grill searches up 38 per cent and pergola searches up 15 per cent, which tells us that hosts want to create a full outdoor room experience – somewhere to cook, eat and entertain.”

What’s driving the growing shift to outdoor entertaining? “A lot of it comes down to how people are rethinking their personal spaces since the pandemic,” says Shah.

“The backyard isn’t an afterthought anymore; it’s become an extension of the living spaces. Plus, with the cost of a

night out nowadays, hosting at home is often the easier and cheaper way to spend time with family and friends.”

Event searches are up by 63 per cent, organizing searches are up 65 per cent and wedding-related searches are up 15 per cent. “Canadians want these milestones to feel memorable, so they’re putting more thought and more prep into it than ever before,” he says.

Late summer entertaining is all about making the most of the last weeks of the season while trying to find ways to manage the rising costs of food — and pretty much everything else, say Sebastien and Sheila Centner, authors of *Eatertainment* (Published in Canada by Appetite by Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, September 13, 2022).

Here are some of their top tips for backyard entertaining on a budget:

STAY IN SEASON. Use ingredients that are local and in-season. “Not only are these products the most flavourful as they are mostly grown nearby, they also are generally way less expensive than options that come from farther away,” they say. “Luckily in Ontario late summer is one of the most bountiful times of year so take advantage.”

KEEP THINGS SIMPLE. You don’t need to overcomplicate things and often it’s best not to, given most of your dishes and drinks will come from inside. A simple grazing platter, a charcuterie and cheese board, some flatbreads and dips, or sharing dishes like their arugula beef salad are easier to serve outdoors.

PICK YOUR TIME. Entertaining can get expensive and the longer your guests



Late summer entertaining is all about making the most of the last weeks of the season, say Sheila and Sebastien Centner. **PHOTOS SUPPLIED**

stay, the more they’ll eat or drink so don’t be shy to set your time based on that. For example, invite guests for an afternoon drink and snack from 2 to 5 p.m. to avoid serving a full meal over lunch or dinner.

LIGHT UP THE NIGHT. Votive candles and tea lights are still the most economical way to add lighting as the sun starts to set earlier. An easy upgrade is placing them in coloured glasses, mason jars or any non-flammable glass vessel instead of having to invest in proper candles.

BATCH YOUR DRINKS. To avoid heading inside constantly to refill drinks, consider making a batched cocktail and placing it in a refillable jug. Ice and garnishes can be stored separately. Invite guests to refill their drinks themselves. Alternatively, if you’re offering wine and beer, have a large ice bucket filled with bottles.

PLAN MUSIC IN ADVANCE. A backyard gathering should always have music in the background. Plan ahead so you’re not fumbling with phones and playlists during your party.

CLEAN UP AS YOU GO. There’s nothing worse than the big cleanup at the end of the night, so stay ahead of it. Empty your dishwasher in advance so it’s ready to be filled and keep some small garbage cans discreetly at the ready with bags already in them. “And finally, as they say in the restaurant business, ‘Full hands in-and-out’ Each trip back inside, make sure to bring that dirty dish or empty glass back in with you to stay ahead of the cleanup.”



Entertainment gurus Sheila and Sebastien Centner suggest making a batched cocktail when entertaining outdoors.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

Entertainment gurus Sebastien and Sheila Centner offer additional outdoor entertaining tips:

Despite warm days, nights can get chilly so remember to have blankets or throws on hand to keep guests comfortable. Put together a small basket of amenities, such as sun lotion, bug spray and tissues to deal with pesky bugs, the scorching sun or late summer sniffles.



There’s no need to overcomplicate things when entertaining outdoors, say Sheila and Sebastien Centner.