

# The great outdoors

Natural gas lets homeowners expand their living spaces outdoors.

By Tonya McMurray

Long, lazy evenings around a fire pit. Grilled food served in the flicker of light from a tiki torch. The soft hum of a patio heater chasing away the chill of an early spring night. It's not hard to understand the allure of outdoor living spaces. And, more and more homeowners are turning to outdoor rooms to expand their living and entertainment space.

The National Association of Home Builders notes that outdoor living spaces are one of the top five trends in new homes. Those outdoor living spaces have evolved beyond the simple grill on the patio to include kitchen set ups, fireplaces, fire pits, gas lights, tiki torches and patio heaters.

Part of the increased interest in outdoor living spaces comes from homeowners who choose to remodel instead of buying a new home, said Andrea Alden with Canada-based Napoleon® Products, North America's largest privately-owned manufacturer of quality wood and gas fireplaces (inserts and stoves), gas and charcoal grills, and outdoor living, heating and cooling products. Napoleon is the only gas furnaces maker in Canada.

"As recently as five years ago, it was very expensive to buy a new home," Alden said. "Instead, homeowners chose to enhance the spaces

that they live in. These remodelling homeowners decided to focus on turning the outdoors into spaces that mimicked the comfort of their indoor spaces."

Those enhancements also serve to increase a home's value, said Carrie deGuzman, senior manager of communications with the Hearth, Patio and Barbecue Association (HPBA).

"From entire patio or deck renovations to simply adding a fire pit, fire table or chimenea for more relaxing evenings in the backyard, consumers are finding creative ways to increase their home's value," deGuzman said. "As the National Association of Realtors reports, outdoor entertaining upgrades are adding significant value to the home and providing people with a large return on their investment."

## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The first step to creating an outdoor living space is to decide to use the space, Alden said. Homeowners may want separate spaces for cooking and eating as well as a place for play, whether that's a pool or a play structure for children.

The different areas can be set apart by creating decorative stone walkways or through the creative placement of furniture and appliances. Lounge chairs, patio swings and chaise lounges can provide comfortable seating areas.

Many consumers turn to natural gas to fuel their outdoor living spaces, relying on the comfort and convenience of a reliable, clean fuel source. Natural gas is both affordable and environmentally friendly.

## NOW WE'RE COOKING

Natural gas grills are often the centerpiece of outdoor living spaces. Whether modestly sized and freestanding or large permanent structures, natural gas grills provide an always-ready cooking appliance. With more precise temperature controls

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Gas grills can create the centerpiece of an outdoor living space. They can be freestanding or permanent structures that create a kitchen space complete with a dining space.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NAPOLEON PRODUCTS



Just as indoor fireplaces provide ambiance and warmth, outdoor fireplaces add flair and comfort to outdoor spaces.



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than propane or charcoal grills, natural gas grills help produce more consistent cooking results and take the guess work out of outdoor cooking.

“Our nation’s passion for culinary adventure continues to expand,” deGuzman said. “Cable and public TV shows spotlight pit masters. Bookshelves and social/digital channels are flourishing with blogs, tips, and videos to help people improve their barbecuing skills. People are generally more confident and enthusiastic about cooking out, and are looking to higher-end grills and accessories to not only improve the flavor and quality of their food, but also their outdoor living experience.”

Gas grills ignite quickly without the long warmup time required for charcoal grills, and the fuel supply is always available. Unlike propane grills, there’s no chance of a tank being low or running out during a cookout. Because natural gas grills connect directly to your home’s existing natural gas line, the fuel is always available and ready to go. Plus, natural gas cookouts cost about one-sixth the cost of a charcoal cookout and three-fourths the cost of a propane cookout.

## **GATHER AROUND THE FIRE**

Just as an indoor fireplace serves as both décor and heat source, outdoor fireplaces provide warmth, add flair and set the mood for outdoor living spaces. Outdoor fireplaces can be surrounded by granite, tile, stone or other material to fit the style of your home and landscaping.

Some homeowners opt for fire pits to provide outdoor ambiance. Fire pits are the modern equivalent of the old-fashioned campfire. Offering a focal point for outdoor gatherings, fire pits are an ideal place to gather around for casual conversation, roasting marshmallows or just enjoying the outdoors. Some fire pits even feature grills for cooking.

While the heat doesn’t always radiate as far as a patio heater, fireplaces and fire pits combine the timeless appeal of a crackling fire with the convenience and safety of the latest natural gas technology. Because there are no sparks or hot embers flying about, gas fire pits and fireplaces are safer and can be located almost anywhere — even close to patio furniture or wood decks.

There is no hassle of gathering or buying wood or trying to start the fire. And, no need to clean out ashes after enjoying a cozy evening fire.

## HEATING UP

If you're looking to increase the number of months you're able to enjoy your outdoor space, outdoor heaters are essential. Patio heaters can generally warm a 12- to 20-foot area, helping to take the chill out of early spring or crisp fall nights. They are most effective when outdoor temperatures are between 40 and 60 degrees Fahrenheit and can be placed almost anywhere.

Heaters can be permanently installed in-ground, deck mounted or hung from a roofline. Other heaters are freestanding and portable to allow for greater flexibility in use.

## LIGHTING THE WAY

Gas-fueled lights and tiki torches add the finishing touches to outdoor living spaces. Whether enclosed or with open flames, outdoor lighting fueled by natural gas offers a reliable light source, even during a power outage. And, while bugs flock to electric lighting, natural gas lighting does not tend to attract insects.

From casual tiki torches to elegant brass or copper lamps, natural gas lighting can complement any outdoor space. Lights can be mounted on exterior walls, porch ceilings or on lamp posts. Light sensors and timers can help reduce fuel use by ensuring that lights are only on when you need them.

Many natural gas appliances — such as grills, lights, patio heaters or fire pits — offer the option of permanent installation or portability. When permanently installed, the appliances will be connected directly

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**— Carrie deGuzman**

to an existing gas line.

If an appliance is portable, gas convenience outlets can be connected to the home's gas supply and installed to allow plug-and-play capability for various gas appliances. Grills, patio heaters, gas lights or other gas appliances then plug into the outlet much like electric appliances plug into electrical outlets.

Outdoor living spaces offer versatility and an inviting, entertaining way to enjoy your home. Whether you have a small patio with a grill or a larger outdoor living space, you can count on natural gas to bring comfort, convenience and ambiance to all your outdoor gatherings. ■

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## BEWARE OF VAMPIRES

Some of the biggest energy wasters in homes are “vampire” electronics — appliances and devices that use energy even when they aren't actively being used. For example, microwaves, DVD players and any other device with a digital clock use electricity even when not in use to keep the digital clock running. And even if your computer is “asleep,” it's still using energy.

Scientists at the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory estimate that standby power accounts for up to 10 percent of household energy consumption. You can save that energy by unplugging appliances and devices when they're not in use.

## OTHER HANDY TIPS

- Clean the dryer's lint filter after each use.
- Dry full loads, but don't overload the machine.
- Set refrigerator temperatures to 37° F and freezer temperatures to 3° F. If your refrigerator has an energy saver switch, be sure it is turned on.

- Run your dishwasher when it is full. Allow dishes to air dry. Not using heat in the drying cycle can save about 20 percent of your dishwasher's total energy use.
- Replace light bulbs with compact fluorescent lights, which last longer and use less than half the energy of traditional incandescent bulbs.
- Choose appliances with the U.S. DOE's ENERGY STAR® label. For more energy saving tips, see [energysaver.gov](http://energysaver.gov).

## DON'T FORGET TO RECYCLE

By now consumers are used to seeing the small triangle that indicates an item is recyclable, and most communities have curbside or drop off recycling locations. Recycling reduces waste sent to landfills, conserves natural resources, and prevents pollution associated with collecting new raw resources. For example, according to the EPA, recycling 1 ton of paper saves 17 trees and 7,000 gallons of water.

Recycling also saves significant energy. Recycling one glass bottle saves enough energy to light a 100-watt light bulb for four hours, according to the EPA. Recycling one aluminum can saves enough energy to run a TV for three hours. As with saving energy in your home, even a small recycling effort can have big energy-saving results. ■

