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PRODUCT SHOWCASE: HOME INSPIRATION

Five tips to *transform* your patch of grass into a veritable, verdant retreat inspired by the New Mediterranean look

Outdoor oasis

by SASCHA LAFLEUR
photos WEST OF MAIN

The great outdoors is once again becoming a focus for many homeowners. Many seek to maximize every inch of their home and every minute of patio season. This year, it's an even bigger consideration, as Canadians find themselves spending more time in the comfort and safety of their home. If a backyard makeover is on your to-do list, follow these tips.

Get in the zone ◆◆◆

Start the transformation by planning the space. How would you like to use your backyard? For dining or entertaining? Reading and relaxing? Sports and games? As a designer, I approach al fresco spaces like I do their indoor counterparts – striving for an equal balance of comfort, function and style. With this in mind, delineate zones that accommodate the activities you like to engage in, and consider the amount of space you'll need for each.

From the ground up ◆◆◆

When you step outside, the backyard should feel like an extension of the indoors. However, look inside for cues. Is your home contemporary, classic or something in between? Echo your interior aesthetic outside to create a sense of continuity. Then, furnish your various zones from the ground up, starting with flooring. A floor is a transformational element that instantly takes your backyard from lawn to living area. Excellent options include wood, stone or tile that will act as a foundation for any outdoor room. There's also a fabulous selection of outdoor rugs that are durable enough to weather storms, sun and wear and tear. Durability is an essential factor to consider when shopping for patio furniture, as well. Choose pieces specifically made for outdoor use that can withstand a downpour and the sun's bleaching effects. Also, ensure your furniture is comfortable.



Landscaping, lighting and accessories ◆◆◆

Much like your indoor living areas, your outdoor spaces need some accent pieces to complete the look. Keep in mind the overall atmosphere of your backyard, and enhance it with lighting, accessories and, of course, plants. Lighting plays a crucial role in highlighting the various functional zones, while adding ambience and safety. Since you're outdoors, the sun acts as your ambient lighting. Be sure to incorporate task lighting where required, such as areas for cooking/barbecue, dining, sitting and bar seating. Illuminate features such as walkways, steps, the entranceway and any other elements that need to remain visible after the sunsets. Then, add accent lighting to bring depth to your design. Focus on trees and plants and any special features, such as a pond, garden gazebo or trellis.

Putting the principles into practice ◆◆◆

I transformed this small but sweet urban backyard into a place to rest, relax and indulge! Full disclosure: I own the property and wanted a place to enjoy fine food and wine, gather with family and friends at the custom outdoor dining table, and warm up around a fire pit on late summer and fall evenings. I started by removing the existing deck and planned and prepped for the fire pit – a gas model that would become a focal point of the space. A gas line from the house fed the fire pit, so we dug a trench leading to our spot of choice, and levelled the ground to prepare it for the floor. We chose 24-in., two-cm porcelain pavers in Gray Flow and Ivory Flow, from Euro Tile & Stone. This classic diamond-checkerboard motif is equally functional and aesthetically pleasing, and perfectly suited to the New Mediterranean style I was going for. I love this durable outdoor flooring, which is resistant to salt, pool chemicals, winter frost and the sun's UV rays. It's also slip-resistant.



Furnish your space ◆◆◆

The furniture I selected has a New Mediterranean, relaxed style – muted earth tones and organic materials. I incorporated a comfortable armless sofa from the West of Main Shoppe custom upholstery line. It's quick-drying and durable, able to withstand all elements while bringing inspiration from far-off travels right into our own backyard. I also added seating around the fire pit with West of Main's signature Tulum outdoor chairs, which feature an ergonomic shape, a wood frame and grey netting that adds visual interest, and different texture and contrast against the white sofa. The custom dining table is the star of the show, inspired by a vineyard visit in San Francisco. The unique centre-trough design is a host's dream, perfect for presenting and serving up a collection of local fine wines.

As a final touch, I accessorized the space with a couple of side tables, some gorgeous textural pillows and throws, and some large potted plants for a relaxed, interior-inspired outdoor living area. The result is a warm, welcoming space that I can really sink into!

Furniture elements available at westofmainshoppe.com



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