



MADE TO ENTERTAIN

Creating an outdoor entertaining area is about personal style and lifestyle needs

Words: Jacki Brown



The best outdoor entertaining areas are an expression of your personal style. The aesthetics and functionality of your outdoor space can reveal a lot about your personality and your lifestyle, but to get the balance just right, you need the input of a design professional. A professionally designed landscape will add to the value of your home and, most importantly, be a gathering point for friends and family who won't be able to wait for an invitation to come over.

Putting function first

An outdoor entertaining area will need to cater for certain functions, which might include gathering people for parties and celebrations, fun, relaxation, eating and drinking, conversation, laughter, and all types of entertainment such as swimming, music, sports and games. Depending on the ways you want to use your outdoor space, the layout and structure, as well as the special features, will differ. For those with scant space, you need to create one space that is multi-functional; for those with larger gardens, you may have the luxury of creating separate outdoor rooms for different purposes, each divided by hedges or built screens.

The entertainers' landscape should be low maintenance and easy to clean so you can spend more time entertaining than tidying. And the everyday elements you find in most gardens

(such as washing lines, bins and toys) should be able to be packed away out of sight when you have visitors around. Some handy items include foldable clotheslines, feature screens, storage boxes and tool sheds.

Decorative touches

Outdoor furniture and decorative features make the space comfortable and inviting to spend time in. You'll need enough room for a table and chairs for dining as well as some casual seating. In-built seating and seating walls are a practical multi-purpose solution, while a variety of other seating can provide interest such as a love seat, daybed or poolside loungers. Foldable or stackable extra seating for larger gatherings can be stored when not in use. If you have a large yard you might want to leave an open space of lawn

1. In this rear garden by Alicia Ferrer of Kokatu Design, an outdoor kitchen area makes entertaining a breeze.

2. A built-in bench and fire pit make for a cosy place to gather with friends. Design by Space Landscape Designs.

3. Casual seating such as beanbags and ottomans is an asset. Pictured, the Isla ottoman from Coast New Zealand.



or paving where you can set up a temporary pergola, gazebo or shelter for those bigger or more formal gatherings.

Good indoor-outdoor connections allow easy access to the kitchen, so that the host is not separated from the action while cooking. An outdoor kitchen makes food preparation part of the fun.

Heaters make an outdoor space more useable in cooler weather and in the evenings, and outdoor lighting — both task and accent — is essential, for functionality and ambience. Screens and walls can also protect your entertaining area from cold winds. Deter insects with citronella candles or oil burners, or with a bug zapper or insect trap — many eco-friendly non-toxic options are available.

Make it inviting

The aesthetics of an entertainer's landscape are crucial — it needs to be a nice environment to spend time in, and may be an exciting or relaxing place where friends and

family are happy to be. It draws people in and has a feeling of privacy or enclosure. Ideally, it should be able to be used in winter as well as summer.

There may be an eye-catching feature in the landscape, which makes a strong impression on your guests, and becomes a conversation piece or focal point. It might be a piece of art or sculpture, a water feature or a spectacular view.

Flowers and plants are an essential finishing touch for scent and decoration, and to soften the space and provide green screening. Plant selection for an entertainer's paradise are bound by the same rules which govern the plant selection of any landscape — soil and climate, aspect, size of garden areas and amount of time you're prepared to give to maintenance.

Your personal touch

Different types of entertainers use their outdoor areas differently, and designing the space is an opportunity to put your personal stamp on to it. The rugged outdoorsy type might have a big deck overlooking treetops where they can sit around a brazier or fire pit and plan their next camping trip. The entertainer who loves the nightlife might opt for modern paved area with impressive mood lighting and an outdoor stereo for alfresco parties. Beach lovers may have a pool, barbecue and sun loungers for laidback days in the sun.

If traditional family gatherings are your type

OPTIONAL INCLUSIONS

- * Barbecue, pizza oven, teppanyaki grill.
- * Fire pit, chiminea, outdoor fireplace.
- * Sun lounges, beanbags, daybeds.
- * Swimming pool, slide, spa, sauna.
- * Outdoor stereo system, outdoor TV.
- * Café tables and cantilever umbrellas.
- * Deck, gazebo, pergola or patio.
- * Water feature, pond, sculpture, art.
- * Lighting, both task and accent.
- * Outdoor kitchen or alfresco bar.
- * Shade and shelter, such as awnings.

of entertaining, the focus might be on the outdoor dining area with big tables and plenty of seating for everyone, as well as some open space where the kids can play. Sports fans might have an area to play sport or an outdoor TV or projector to watch favourite sporting events.

Because there are so many different ways of entertaining, there's no particular landscape style that suits an entertainers' garden more than any other, so the creative possibilities are limited only by your imagination. ■

This article was prepared by Jacki Brown and the team at ecodesign on behalf of the Australian Institute of Landscape Designers & Managers (AILDM). If you would like to find an AILD member in your area, visit the website: www.aildm.com.au

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