

How to add appeal to a patio or deck

By Melinda Myers

Summer means time spent gardening and relaxing with friends. And just like the kitchen in winter, the patio or deck tends to be the gathering spot when the weather turns warm.

Get the most from this space with a bit of preseason planning and decorating. Select functional and beautiful furnishings to create a special spot for you, family and friends to enjoy whenever the weather allows.

First, sketch out the space and measure the dimensions of all furnishings you are considering, making sure they will fit. Allow extra space for people to pull chairs in and out from the table and navigate around furnishings, preferably 3 to 4 feet.



Raised beds and multipurpose potting benches can add beauty and functionality to a patio or deck. Photo/Gardener's Supply Company

Next, select a table that fits the space and provides ample serving space. An extension table allows you to expand your surface if a few more folks drop by. A round folding table provides space for guests, and it can be stashed against the wall when workspace is needed.

Small- and large-space gardeners will enjoy the benefits of elevated gardens with built-in trellises. These maximize growing space even on a small deck or patio and bring the garden to the party. Look for self-watering planters and especially those with wheels so you can easily move them out of the way of a family gathering or closer to the kitchen for easy harvesting.

Include a multifunctional piece like a potting bench. Look for

a versatile and well-built, furniture-quality piece that complements other furnishings and can be used as a serving surface when entertaining. Consider features like a faucet for washing and watering that drains into a bucket or the ground, as well as hooks for hanging tools and baskets and space for storage.

Bring nature to your door and mask unwanted background noise with the soothing sound of water. Wall-mounted and container fountains add the sound and motion of water to even the smallest patios and decks. Watch for colorful winged visitors stopping by for a sip.

Extend your enjoyment into the evening with pleasing outdoor lighting. Make sure the light is deflected and not shining directly into visitors' eyes. Downward facing overhead lights brighten large areas. Use them to illuminate key spaces such as those used for cooking. Strands of lights on structures, ribs of an umbrella or the underside of a bar provide a festive touch.

Use tabletop lighting to create a more intimate mood. Outdoor flameless candles add warmth to your space while a solar lantern adds charm. Look for a style that complements your outdoor décor.

Add pathway lighting to direct guests to the patio or on a stroll through the garden. Solar lighting allows flexibility and eliminates the need for trenching wires to a power source. Think beyond traditional pathway and railing lighting. Strategically placed upward lighting of structures and plants or downward lighting hung from above can also provide needed illumination.

Whatever the size of your patio or deck you can create an inviting outdoor space for gardening and entertaining. Just invest a bit of time planning and shopping for attractive and functional furnishings. Then sit back and relax in your newly

decorated space.

Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening." She hosts The Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" DVD series and the nationally syndicated "Melinda's Garden Moment" TV and radio segments.